

# CRITICISMS

J. M. ROBERTSON

VOL. I



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# CRITICISMS

BY

JOHN M. ROBERTSON

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*BY THE SAME AUTHOR.*

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ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD.  
NEW ESSAYS TOWARDS A CRITICAL METHOD.  
MONTAIGNE AND SHAKSPERE.  
BUCKLE AND HIS CRITICS: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY.  
THE SAXON AND THE CELT: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY.  
MODERN HUMANISTS: STUDIES OF CARLYLE, MILL,  
EMERSON, ARNOLD, RUSKIN, AND SPENCER.  
THE FALLACY OF SAVING: A STUDY IN ECONOMICS.  
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LETTERS ON REASONING.  
AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH POLITICS.  
PATRIOTISM AND EMPIRE.  
WRECKING THE EMPIRE.

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N O T E .

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THE following papers are all reprints, more or less inexact. I am naturally the last person to lay any invidious stress on the fact that the periodicals in which they originally appeared are now without exception defunct; but the acknowledgment seems fair, as well as expedient by way of explaining the absence of "the usual acknowledgments". For the act of reprinting there are several excuses, of which perhaps the best is that in even the most juvenile papers there are some things that seem to need reaffirming.

J. M. R.

*November, 1902.*

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# CRITICISMS.

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## HERRICK.

(1891.)

THE spirit of contradiction must surely be roused in many a reader of the new edition of Herrick,\* by the preface of Mr. Swinburne. An exquisite edition it is, incomparably printed at the Aberdeen University Press, and laudably edited by Mr. Pollard; and if there is any incongruity in the entire production it is perhaps the selection of Mr. Swinburne to do the critical introduction. Not that Mr. Swinburne may not be trusted generally to appreciate any English poet: he has the most catholic of palates; but, somehow, to set the author of 'A Study of Ben Jonson' to praise or appraise the author of the 'Hesperides' seems a fantastic proceeding. The only visible plea is that Herrick admired Ben even more than Mr. Swinburne does. How shall Herrick's toying touches be celebrated aright by grape-shot adjectives, and chain-shot superlatives, and the machine-guns of alliteration and antithesis? Really, to turn Mr. Swinburne on Herrick is like setting the oak-rending elephant to pick up sixpences—if we may compare Mr. Swinburne to anything at once

\* Lawrence and Bullen: 'Muses' Library,' 2 vols.

massive and good-tempered. One pictures—to change the figure—Herrick's fleets of toy-boats driven before the wind and tide of Mr. Swinburne's polylogous rhetoric like sticks on a spate. And in plain fact, the characterisations here given of Herrick's work are so deafening that even where, being interpreted, they are partly just, they sound monstrous. This for instance: "The fantastic and the brutal blemishes which deform and deface the loveliness of his incomparable genius are hardly so damaging to his fame as his general monotony of matter and of manner." What a way to write of Herrick! This is verily that Mr. Swinburne who sounds the praises of babies with a trombone. And take again this: "The sturdy student (!) who tackles his Herrick as a schoolboy is expected to tackle his Horace, in a spirit of pertinacious and stolid straightforwardness (!), will probably find himself before long so nauseated by the incessant inhalation of spices and flowers, condiments and kisses, that if a musk-rat had run over the page it could hardly be less endurable to the physical than it is to the spiritual stomach." Some men might be allowed to say this unhidden: Doctor Johnson, for instance, or Mr. Justice Stephen; but from the lips of the most aromatic and amoristic (one catches his own style) of all English poets, the most cloying of sensuous verbalists, it is insufferable. Herrick has his faults, plenty of them; but Mr. Swinburne, in the character of "sturdy student", is not decently to be accepted as his accuser.

Even when he is giving praise, and here much

more amazingly, Mr. Swinburne is in the wrong key. It makes one gasp to read such criticism as this: "Herrick, of course, lives simply by virtue of his songs; his more ambitious or pretentious lyrics are merely magnified and prolonged and elaborated songs. Elegy or litany, epicede or epithalamium, his work is always a song-writer's; nothing more, but nothing less, than the work of the greatest song-writer—as surely as Shakspeare is the greatest dramatist—ever born of the English race." And after speaking, as above cited, of the monotony of Herrick's manner, the critic goes on to intimate that "the apparent or external variety of his versification is, I should suppose, incomparable". Now, this description of Herrick as a great song-writer is simply an incredible misrepresentation. He wrote songs as he wrote epigrams, and litanies, and epistles, and dialogues, and apostrophes; but to call all these things songs is as uncritical as to call them all epigrams. And Herrick is no more the greatest English song-writer than he is the greatest English theologian. He wrote some beautiful songs; but he is not even typically a lyricist. On the contrary, he almost wholly lacks the most eminent essential of a great lyricist, to wit, passion; and he is just as much lacking in the next greatest essential, namely, pathos. This is the rebuttal of even the judgment passed on Herrick by Mr. Lowell—that he is the most Catullian of poets since Catullus. One of the prime qualities of Catullus is pathetic passion: witness the *Coeli, Lesbia nostra, Lesbia illa*, the laments for the dead brother,

the *Si qua recordanti*, the love songs, and the love curses. In all Herrick there is never once the grief of the *Atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale*, or the desire of the *Vivamus mea Lesbia*. But if we put these Catullian qualities aside, Mr. Lowell's parallel would pass well enough; for Herrick is very much Catullus minus the poignant notes, and might have sung the *Dianae sumus in fide*, or indited the lines to the God of Gardens, or that *Luctus in morte passeris* which to so many people stands for Catullus complete. In their epigrams, the two poets have plenty in common. The comparison has much force, as every purely literary judgment by Mr. Lowell has. But to call Herrick the greatest of song-writers in one of the most lyric of literatures is unqualified error.

Mr. Swinburne's palate is indeed going when he can err like this. Any one who remembered Herrick's best effects would see on a moment's comparison that many of them are not lyrical. One indeed values Herrick for a dozen different sorts of successes, but surely among the lovers of poetry not the least relished of his fine things are the verses on 'His Poetry his Pillar', with the sounding close:—

"Pillars let some set up  
If so they please:  
Here is my hope  
And my Pyramides."

That is not a lyric effect at all: it is an effect of cadence and sonority; and the fact is that Herrick is above all things a minor poetic artist, who indeed wrote songs because song-writing was a branch of

poetic art, but did it consciously and curiously, as a turner of verse and a framer of fancies, not at all as a true lyrist, who sings to relieve his heart. It is only as an artist in verse that Herrick is to be understood. Whatever came to him he made verses on, carving his heads on cherry-stones, chestnuts, chips, ivories, turnips, pebbles, pillars, or posts. Hence the medley of his book: ribald epigrams jostling tender love speeches, flower-songs perfuming vulgarities, and sententious maxims alternating with erotics. The monotony of which Mr. Swinburne twice accuses him, while admitting the "external variety of his versification", is really an external monotony, consisting in that fatal proclivity to the couplet which here already asserts itself, before the Restoration. In theme he is as varied as any writer of occasional verse ever was, taking an obvious artistic delight in poetising on everything; and his variety of versification, so far as it goes, shows his artistic sense of the need to transcend the couplet for fine effects. His own feeling about his work comes out well in the admirable stanzas (201) headed "To live merrily and to trust to good verses". With a true craftsman's touch he works up a handful of classical reminiscences:—

"Now reigns the rose, and now  
Th' Arabian dew besmears  
My uncontrolled brow  
And my retorted hairs"

—where, by the way, "retorted" clearly does not mean, as Mr. Pollard annotates, "bound back"—

the "uncontrolled brow" negates that—but either simply turned or twisted back, or more strictly, "curled", as in the passage of Martial cited, and as was the fact in regard to Herrick's person. After some stanzas of less felicity, one being quite bad, we have that finely satisfying one,

"Then this immensive cup  
Of aromatic wine,  
Catullus, I'll quaff up  
To that terse muse of thine ; "

and finally the moral :—

"Trust to good verses then ;  
They only will aspire  
When pyramids, as men,  
Are lost i' the funeral fire."

It is the very doctrine of Gautier, who, in his French and nineteenth century way, resembles Herrick a good deal, and was no more a lyrist, and no less an artist and connoisseur, than he :—

"Tout passe—L'art robuste  
Seul a l'éternité ;  
Le buste  
Survit a la cité.  
"Les dieux eux-mêmes meurent,  
Mais les vers souverains  
Demeurent  
Plus forts que les airains."

Gautier, with his intense delight in detail and the minor arts, his love of the quaint and the archaic, his zest in living, his variety of cordial satisfactions, his cheerful reduction of all themes to the consciously artistic plane, is really what Herrick might have become to-day. Herrick's anomalous piety, which

was simply the artistic expression of religious sentiment in a day when such sentiment had not been specialised, as in evangelicalism, would be spontaneously transmuted into Gautier's catholic appreciation of all forms of religion as phases of the moral and social picturesque. That temper is already apparent in the charming lines on 'The Fair Temple; or, Oberon's Chapel' (233):—

“Now, this the fairies would have known,  
Theirs is a mixed religion;  
And some have heard the elves it call  
Part Pagan, part Papistical.”

It would be idle nowadays to discuss the point of the religious sincerity of the 'Noble Numbers' as contrasted with the epigram-mongering of the 'Hesperides': not that the mixture is to-day unknown, but that the frank exhibition of it belongs to another age, and the spectacle now makes people suspect hypocrisy where hypocrisy would be an anachronism. The emotions in those days were more homogeneous; so much so that we should do Herrick a certain injustice if we read his queerly-sophisticated lines to his dying brother (186) as we should read a similar performance on the part of a contemporary. Just as they turned everything into drama in those days—history, philosophy, ethics, legend, contemporary news—so they were prepared to turn everything into verse; and Art moved freely over the face of life, unscared by the spirit of analysis. But the fact remains, of course, that Herrick does not reach the deeper springs of feeling. His greatest moments, like

Gautier's, are those of the artist rising to the height of his vocation, as in the famous lines (716):—

“’Tis not every day that I  
Fitted am to prophesy;  
No, but when the spirit fills  
The fantastic pannicles,  
Full of fire, then I write,  
As the Godhead doth indite.  
“Thus enraged, my lines are hurled,  
Like the Sibyl's, through the world.  
Look how next the holy fire  
Either slakes, or doth retire;  
So the fancy cools, till when  
That brave spirit comes again.”

Of course, it were to denaturalise Herrick to present him as typified in that flight of inspiration. He is most exquisite, most intimate, in those flower-pieces where his natural tenderness for the feminine plays freely without the cheapening suggestion of beau-ish gallantry. Only Shakspeare, then or since, loved flowers so spontaneously. Mr. Swinburne rather oddly—he is always odd in this preface—observes that “Everyone knows the song, ‘Gather ye rose-buds while ye may’; few, I fear, by comparison, know the yet sweeter and better song, ‘Ye have been fresh and green’.” They know their Herrick ill who go no further afield than that for their posy. The lilt ‘To Violets’ (205):—

“Welcome, maids of honour:  
You do bring  
In the spring,  
And wait upon her;”

the careful canticle, ‘To Primroses filled with Morning Dew’ (257); the melodious sighs over the ‘Fair



Daffodils' (316), and the 'Blossoms' (469); and again the smile over 'The Primrose' (582), and over a hundred flowers more, and over 'The Apron of Flowers' (742), all have the true Hesperidean charm; while the songs, 'To Anthea' (267) and 'Go, Happy Rose' (238) are surely as good in their way as 'Gather ye Rosebuds'. The "sturdy student" in that delightful wilderness will find scores, if only he be not too sturdy.

It is a mistake, however, to call Herrick, as one critic has done, the poet of country life in particular. True, he loved flowers, and could toy delightedly with country things; and he sang in praise of

"Sweet country life, to such unknown  
Whose lives are others', not their own;"

and again of 'His Content in the Country' (554); but he cries out just as often of "this loathed country life" (458), of his "banishment into the loathed West" (371), and of his 'Discontent in Devon' (51). It is entertaining to compare the two last-cited deliverances. One runs:—

"Before I went  
To banishment  
Into the loathed west  
I could rehearse  
A lyric verse,  
And speak it with the best.

"But time, ah me!  
Has laid, I see,  
My organ fast asleep,  
And turn'd my voice  
Into the noise  
Of those that sit and weep."

The other goes :—

“More discontents I never had  
 Since I was born than here,  
 Where I have been, and still am sad,  
 In this dull Devonshire;  
 Yet justly too, I must confess  
 I ne’er invented such  
 Ennobled numbers for the press  
 Than where I loathed so much.”

It is needless to point the moral. The artist had a faculty for country happiness, and a faculty for changing his mind; and on the whole he probably enjoyed life more heartily in town, drinking and versifying with his revered old Ben, than among the quiet meadows of which he sang so winningly. His clerical career will not compose with his verse, whatever we may imagine for ourselves of the twelve silent latter years of his rural life, from 1662 till his death in 1674. His portrait, here reproduced, is a decisive document on that head. It is a comically unreverend countenance, hardly English, as types are held to go, and will go far to justify the likening him to Gautier, the rotund apostle of the delights of art and sense, refined or otherwise. But when all is said, who can leave Herrick with an unkind word? Rather let us stretch a point a long way, and acquiesce in his full-throated invitation (8) as to ‘When he would have his Verses read’:—

“In sober mornings do not thou rehearse  
 The holy incantation of a verse;  
 But when that men have both well drunk and fed,  
 Let my enchantments then be sung or read.  
 When laurel spirts in the fire, and when the hearth

Smiles to itself and gilds the roof with mirth ;  
 When up the thyrse is raised, and when the sound  
 Of sacred orgies flies around, around ;  
 When the rose reigns, and locks with ointment shine  
 Let rigid Cato read these lines of mine."

Never, certainly, was he more readable than in this beautiful edition, where the placable scholar knows he has the coarser things available in the separate appendix, if he ever has need to compare them, and so can with a clear conscience profit by their exclusion from the main volumes. There are, indeed, a few oversights which one would have expected Mr. Pollard to escape. For instance, the 'Bacchanalian Verse', number 655,

"Fill me a mighty bowl  
 Up to the brink,  
 That I may drink  
 Unto my Jonson's soul,"

is here printed, as usual, with "brim" for "brink", though it is perfectly clear that that, if it so stands in the original, is one of the printer's errors against which Herrick protested; and though the slip had already been corrected in the edition of H. G. Clarke, for one. And Mr. Pollard, like Mr. Henry Morley, spells "Sybil" instead of "Sibyl", in number 716, doing it again twice over in his footnote. The spelling of Mr. Disraeli ought surely not to prevail in this matter, even if Herrick's printers anticipated it. The new footnotes, too, might at times be dispensed with. But these are small blemishes in a book, the mere aspect of which is a pleasure. We have here a choice reprint of the 'Hesperides', with the original

numbering of the pieces; and this, were it for no other reason, is bound to become the standard edition.\*

↓

[\* The market reception of the 'Muses' Library' editions does not now [1902] seem to bear out the above forecast; but as regards Herrick the output of cheaper editions is doubtless the explanation. No old English poet has been more reprinted in the last century. Apart from selections, there were editions in 1844, '46, '52, '56, '59, '76, '84 (cheap), '91 ('Muses' Library'), '93, '99, and 1901, the last three being progressively cheaper. Next to Shakspeare, Herrick ought thus to be now the best known poet of the Tudor-Stuart era.]

## MARVELL.

(1892.)

AMONG the English poets who are famous without being read, Andrew Marvell has perhaps the highest place. The erudite 'Ouida' has somewhere a fling at the popularity enjoyed by modern versifiers, "while Marvell stands unread on the shelves"; and the unqualified nature of the praise implied may justify a speculation as to whether he is on the novelist's own shelves for reference. Similar tributes, and some more specific, are periodically paid; but the historians of English literature give Marvell little room, and the brilliant Taine passes him by altogether. The explanation is simple. Out of a body of verse which now fills two volumes in the new edition in the dainty 'Muses' Library', all that is durably delightful to the lover of poetry may be put in about fifty small pages. And yet some of this choice work is so choice, and some lines of it are so memorable and so incomparable, that Marvell's name is quite sure of literary immortality. His niche is a minute one, but it is perfectly safe.

To a sympathetic eye, Marvell's figure in poetry has some touch of the forlorn splendor that Taine so well assigns to that of Milton, standing on a tableland with the mountain tops of the Shakspearean age behind and the Popean plain below. Marvell is far down towards the plain; but even he has his rare echoes of the elder music; and the short vibrations

of his lyre at times so strike the ear that we feel the best Elizabethans would have welcomed him as of Apollo's band. Indeed, Marvell's best lines have a quality of intension that raises them to the highest place, combining as they do the vigorous felicity and inspiration of the morning age with the sententiousness of the age of "prose and reason". A happy sample is this stanza from the charming English original of his poem 'The Garden', which he turned, also charmingly, into Latin:—

“Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,  
Withdraws into its happiness:—  
The mind, that ocean where each kind  
Does straight its own resemblance find:—  
Yet it creates, transcending these,  
Far other worlds, and other seas,  
Annihilating all that's made  
To a green thought in a green shade.”

Shakspeare might have done the last couplet, which is in the best vein of Marvell's youth, and of his youth only. It was at the age of twenty-nine, after four years of continental travel, and as many of obscure town life in England, that he went to be the tutor of Lord Fairfax's little daughter at Appleton, in Yorkshire. He thus came to the quiet and the charm of English country life with the best preparation for valuing it, and it is from him that we get almost the last for over a hundred years of that poetry of green Nature which makes Milton's shorter poems, perhaps, more perdurable than even the longer. Marvell, indeed, has not the Miltonic breadth; and when we read his lines 'Upon the Hill and Grove at

Billborow' we are led to reflect on the gain that ultimately came of the eighteenth century interlude to the English imagination. There is no hint of Wordsworth in Marvell:—

“Here learn, ye mountains more unjust,  
Which to abrupter greatness thrust;  
Which do, with your hook-shouldered height,  
The earth deform, and heaven fright;  
For whose excrescence, ill-design'd  
Nature must a new centre find;  
Learn here those humble steps to tread  
Which to securer glory lead.”

But all the same, there is an authentic beauty in the poem on Appleton House, with its vistas of wooded peace:—

“The arching boughs unite between  
The columns of the temple green;  
And underneath the wingèd quires  
Echo about their tunèd fires.  
The nightingale does here make choice  
To sing the trials of her voice;  
Low shrubs she sits in, and adorns  
With music high the squatted thorns;  
But highest oaks stoop down to hear,  
And listening elders prick the ear . . . .  
Then as I careless on the bed  
Of gelid strawberries do tread,  
And through the hazels thick espy  
The hatching throstle's shining eye;  
The heron, from the ash's top  
The eldest of its young lets drop,  
As if it stork-like did pretend  
That tribute to its lord to send . . . .  
Thus I, easy philosopher,  
Among the birds and trees confer,  
And little now to make me wants,  
Or of the fowls, or of the plants. . . .  
Already I begin to call  
In their most learned original;

And, where I language want, my signs  
 The bird upon the bough divines. . . .  
 No leaf does tremble in the wind  
 Which I returning cannot find;  
 Out of these scattered Sibyl's leaves  
 Strange prophecies my fancy weaves. . . ."

Yet this clear music is every here and there jarred upon by those glassy and chilling conceits, which seem to represent an inevitable disease in the poetry of the time, turning the excesses and extravagances of the older verse into something inorganic and repulsive, like (to fall into the very vein) the chalk-stones which the gout of eld produces after a middle-age of wine. Marvell's conceits are as bad as his felicities are good. Of Vere and Fairfax and their dwellings he predicts that

"Men will dispute how their extent  
 Within such dwarfish confines went."

He sings of

"Tears (watery shot that pierce the mind),  
 And sighs (love's cannon charged with wind);"

and his preposterous panegyric of the little damosel to whom he taught languages is a striking reminder that all the crop of rank-worship and Grundyism and snobbery of later England has come from roots of feudalism which were vigorous under the Commonwealth. It strikes us now as a strangely composite age; and nowhere is its mixture of elements more remarkable than in Marvell's most remarkable poem, that addressed 'To his Coy Mistress'. It contains some of his finest and best-known lines, and yet it cannot be quoted in full in the manuals, which are



forced to restrict themselves to the verses on the Bermudas—certainly excellent in their way. In the former poem the amorous fire of the elder time, which was to become the mere debauchery of a later, seems to touch the semi-Puritan Marvell into a singular strength of phrase and feeling. Grave divines have turned to an austerer moral than his the lines :—

“But at my back I always hear  
Time’s winged chariot hurrying near;  
And yonder all before us lie  
Deserts of vast eternity”;

and it is not easy to forget the pagan power of those at the close :—

“Let us roll all our strength and all  
Our sweetness up into one ball,  
And tear our pleasures with rough strife  
Thorough the iron gates of life.”

Yet even these great lines are jostled by perverse and prosaic conceits; as the earlier poems in mass, with their lyric motive, are followed by a poetry of politics and controversy and invective unworthy of the poetic name. There was really not enough of the true fire in Marvell to keep him to genuine artistic production; he became a politician, certainly with a good record, but leading his life with a certain want of purpose and efficiency which leaves us to the irresistible conclusion that his character lacked energy all round. He seems to typify the impotence that fell upon what was best in England after the Commonwealth sank into a dictatorship, and the fallen hopes of forward-looking men were overwhelmed in the vulgar back-rush of royalism. Marvell, who had been

Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth in conjunction with Milton, was an enlightened and moralised intelligence, standing appreciatively between the Protector and the Restoration ; paying dignified tribute, in the well-known lines, to the first Charles, who

“Nothing common did, or mean,  
Upon that memorable scene ”

of his execution ; and paying also a dignified if somewhat over-ambitious and labored and artificial homage to the career and the memory of Cromwell. But with the Restoration he was quite in sympathy ; and though he seems to have once or twice sharply satirised the worthless King as well as denounced the courtiers and the courtesans, he never heartily rose above the level of lamenting that His Majesty should not be better advised. He seems to have been a half-blanché Addison, moral and dignified in inaction, with the more robust vocabulary of the pre-Augustan age, but with the Addisonian inability to rise above his period. So during the long years of his membership for Hull, he conscientiously earned his 6s. 8d. a day—so the constituencies paid their members then—by silently attending the debates and briefly reporting them to his constituents ; save when he was employed as a subordinate in diplomatic missions to the Continent, seeing life without getting much out of it. The literary impulse survived in him only in the propensity to versified satire and prose polemics, in both of which walks he was contemporarily successful without exercising any discernible influence upon history. The prose is admittedly good,

and the wit of it was admired by such a wit as Swift ; but its subject-matter is temporary and forgotten ; and while the satires are rightly reprinted with his better poetry for the information of students, nobody now alive can find joy in them. They are not notable even as art : always a trifle short-winded. Marvell retains little rhythmic quality in his political verse, which is always in couplets ; and the spirit in which he acclaims Cromwell's unscrupulous attack on Spain, and hails what he exultingly dreams may be the beginning of a new era of Cæsarism, is a memorable witness to the undying lust of tyranny and conquest, inveterate in the Puritan as in the Pagan. In his verses on ' The Loyal Scot ' he offered a much-needed and partly penitent service to the cause of the Union of the two kingdoms ; but his attack on Holland, albeit the most powerful of his satirical pieces, is in the worst vein of racial malice. Here, doubtless, we must think of him as the mouthpiece of the average carnal man, whose hates he could not transcend. For the rest, it is to be remembered to his honor that he held by high standards in domestic politics. He was content to live on his pay as a member of Parliament—with such " presents " as were customary—while venality flaunted around him ; and the story of his refusal of a Court bribe while very poor seems perfectly probable. He was, in fine, a man who would have esteemed and communed with Fletcher of Saltoun had he lived to know him, though he lacked Fletcher's intensity of spirit.

Of the present issue of his poems, which is care-

fully edited by Mr. G. A. Aitken, it is hardly necessary to say more than that it is worthy of the 'Muses' Library'. Mr. Aitken, indeed, does not wholly escape the normal ill-fate of commentators. In his note on the word "holtfelster" in the poem 'Upon Appleton House' he oddly alleges that "'Holt' is German for wood", while accepting Dr. Grosart's clearly sound suggestion that "holtfelster" means "forester". There is no current German word "holt": the German word is "holz"; and "holt" is good old English, occurring in Chaucer, and so late as Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall'. Besides, Mr. Aitken prints the line, "Who here as the holtfelster's care", whereas the "as" should clearly be "has". In view of this, it would have been better if Mr. Aitken had not disparaged the American edition which was included in 'Murray's Reprints', and has been the principal means of putting Marvell in the way of recent readers with small purses. That edition does indeed read "holtselster", which is unintelligible; but it gives the "has" correctly; and as it was the first reprint since 1776, and had bad texts to proceed upon, it deserves well of book-lovers. As a whole, of course, Mr. Aitken's edition easily supersedes not only that but all former editions, alike for text and notes.

## JANE AUSTEN.

(1890.)

IT is a comfort to find Mr. Goldwin Smith once more turning aside for a moment from the field of politics, where his activities latterly run so much to hurting old friends and gratifying old enemies, to "talk literature" on a text which raises no burning questions. Once upon a time, Mr. Smith seemed as likely to be a man of letters as to be a politician; and it is on record that a review by him of Arnold's first volume of verse gave the young poet a potent encouragement in his career. When, indeed, Mr. Smith wrote on Cowper in the 'English Men of Letters' series, there was a good deal of outcry about his want of active sympathy with the character of his subject; the common theory apparently being that he who writes about a morbid and nervous man should himself be morbid or at least nervous, on the principle of the fat driver of fat oxen in the parody. It may be doubted whether that outcry was judicious, and whether Mr. Goldwin Smith's book on Cowper may not in the long run be adjudged a more valuable production than would have been a typically sympathetic study. However that may be, his 'Life of Jane Austen' is a very readable performance, and one over which many who are much averse to his politics may meet him in that wholesome spirit of goodfellowship which is bred of the disinterested love

of literature. Like most, I had almost said all, men of good natural parts, he delights in Jane Austen; and he seems in this little book to have had a genial wish to communicate his delight to his fellow-countrymen. True, he has done too much of the work of the doctrinaire, and too little of that of the disinterested man of letters, to be able to handle his theme with the ideal flexibility; he remains the austere publicist unbending over his books, not the artistic expositor for whom criticism is in itself an absorbing pursuit. But there is a certain not unwelcome aroma of idiosyncrasy in Mr. Smith's treatment of his subject; and not the least attractive thing about his book is the feeling that Jane Austen herself would have greatly appreciated such exposition and such criticism. She would see in such an admirer, we feel, something of the qualities of her own Mr. Knightley—perhaps of Mr. John in particular—and she would be the last woman in the world to mind about Mr. Smith's politics.

What little there is to tell about Jane Austen's life is here told weightily and judiciously. Her sound mental tone, her healthily critical good nature, her admirable literary modesty, her solid personal goodness of character, are all presented to us simply and attractively, and certainly with no waste of words. Small as it is, Mr. Smith's book consists to the extent of nearly two-thirds of detailed expositions of the novels—a kind of writing which at first is only too apt to repel the reader who knows them. And yet, if the lover of Jane Austen, familiar as he must be

with her books, will just read Mr. Smith's expositions of the stories he will find them done well, and done in such a way as to send fresh readers to the stories themselves. For Jane Austen's reputation is steadily on the increase.\* Admired from the first by such judges as Scott and Macaulay, and later by Lewes, she has only of late years seemed to gain a really wide audience, the reason being that the wide modern development of the novel in the direction of delicacy and subtlety of character-painting has greatly multiplied the readers capable of appreciating her art. To those adult readers who happen to go to her now for the first time (a conjuncture difficult to understand, but known often to occur) one of the most remarkable features of her work will be the modernness of her method. Half the time, save for the old-world intonations of her narrative style, she might be a contemporary of Mr. Howells. Her art-concealing art, her lucky way of making the comic character reveal herself or himself without a word of description, is quite abreast of the latest literary craftsmanship. And, talking of Mr. Howells, must we say that, while she excels him, not merely relatively to her time but absolutely, in the vitality of her comedy, she is a good deal weaker than he in her more serious work? There is no denying that, as

[\* About 1887, the only editions of Jane Austen, I believe, were the unattractive one then published by Messrs. Bentley, at 6s. per volume, and the still more unattractive cheap edition issued by Messrs. Routledge. Within the past ten years, at least three new and agreeable editions have found a ready market.]

Mr. Goldwin Smith puts it, we enjoy best her fools, her sneaks, her grotesques, which will never be surpassed in this world for their combination of everyday truth with the fun of caricature. When she comes to the good people, especially the good men, she is not particularly inspired. Her moral code has all the flavor of commonplace that belonged to the serious English thought of her day: she appeals didactically—in the main, indeed, quite sensibly, but always unoriginally—to the established moral conventions, and is so much less naturally a humanist than a *comédienne* that she always presents to us the higher virtues and the graver vices of her personages in a narrative and non-dramatic form. And yet there is more in Macaulay's praise of the discrimination of her men characters than Mr. Smith is disposed to allow. Granted that her good young men resemble each other, and her bad young men likewise, there is always something in her stiffest portraits which suggests study from the life: you feel that she had seen her character, if only she could have risen to the interest of originally handling it—if only she had not been after all an English clergyman's daughter in the period just after the French Revolution.

And yet, what can be more wonderful than her endowment and achievement as it was? Coming after Richardson, and Fielding, and Miss Burney, and Mrs. Radcliffe, her work is a revelation of the possibilities of the novel in the way of the presentment of normal character independently of thrilling plot. While the possibility of the non-romantic novel



was barely realised, and when the importance of observation in fiction was only vaguely acknowledged, her eye spontaneously found in the little drawing-room life of provincial England a whole world of intellectual light and shade. She must have been a matchless observer; for surely Mr. Smith obscures the point when he repudiates the notion that she as a rule put her acquaintances in her stories. She may only have pieced bits of them together, but none the less she transcribes life. As Mr. James confesses, the novel "lives by" the presentment of real people—if only Mr. James would learn how true that is, and give us a little more of the real people! Jane Austen had the gift, not so much of "creating" types, as Mr. Smith puts it on his first page, as of delightedly transcribing character. To class her, as Mr. Smith does, with "Homer, Shakspeare, Cervantes, Scott, and a few others," is surely again a trifle indiscriminating. As well group together Titian and Raphael and Rembrandt and Hogarth and Meissonnier: there is literally all the difference in the world between such manifestations of genius. Scott's strength, for one thing, lay largely in his humorous enjoyment of Scotch character; Jane Austen's lay in her—shall we say?—smiling cynicism. For cynicism she had, though Mr. Smith's affection makes him shrink from the word. When she demurely applauds the two married sisters who could retain their affection for each other though settled in the same neighbourhood, he anxiously tells us that we "must be on our guard against taking playful irony for cynicism", because,

Jane Austen being "a member herself of a most united family, she could not really think it difficult for two sisters and their husbands to live near each other without quarrelling". This is just a little gratuitous. Jane Austen knew, as a matter of fact, that in a very large number of cases married sisters do *not* agree when settled near each other, and she smilingly stated the fact. Indeed she has given us a set of pictures of disunited families, of families with no community of character or feeling, which at times might almost appal us when we feel how lightly she took it all. Decidedly she was cynical—in her own exquisite way.

But none of her lovers can leave her with a word which is even unreasonably associated with a repellent quality, especially when the subject is raised by such an appreciative book as Mr. Goldwin Smith's. Strictly speaking, indeed, his performance does not amount to a book: with a little less exposition of the stories, it might have made a review article in the heroic days of Macaulay and Southey. It is almost impossible, indeed, to write a book on Jane Austen: you must not write treatises on miniatures. But while Mr. Smith is now and then a trifle stiff, once or twice very lax in his style, and at times a little ostentatious of his own conventionality, he yet furnishes us with a masculine and intelligent account of Jane Austen, adequately warmed by appreciation and affection. The only point at which he seems to me unjust is in his criticism of 'Lady Susan'. One is half afraid to go back to that book after Mr. Smith's

cold words about it, but, speaking on old recollection, I am disposed to say that the world will not so willingly as he let it go out of sight; and that if it be compared with 'Ouida's' 'Moths', of which it seems to have suggested the motive, the earlier performance, with its unforced power and its unadorned simplicity, will not be the one to suffer. Its plot, says Mr. Smith, in his most Anglo-Saxonic manner, is "worthy of a Parisian novelist".\* Well, is that a proof of its inferiority? Is it not the last proof of her genius that she could anticipate the modern Parisian novelist by one performance in her perfectly feminine and English way, while also anticipating the modern American novelist in her treatment of normal character? Wonderful little woman! She lived and died in the very atmosphere of unintelligence, and she has left us a body of work alive with intelligence, nay with genius, in every page, and only dulled here and there by the spirit of her time, which was too strong with her. For her there were no problems of life or society or philosophy: she took her framework as she found it, and painted what she saw within it, so far as she could venture. Would that we had such another artist to-day, with or without the same limitations!

\* The British reader in general may do well to recall Coleridge's ballad 'The Three Graves' and Miss Thackeray's 'Story of Elizabeth'.

## HAWTHORNE.

(1890.)

A MEMOIR of Nathaniel Hawthorne—and there has been a surprising number of them—has always a certain air of anomaly. One goes through the biographies in turn—Mr. Page's, Mr. Lathrop's, Julian Hawthorne's, Mr. James's, and now Mr. Conway's—and never does one escape the feeling that one has been following a life peculiarly insusceptible of being told or written about. Hawthorne, so to speak, is not a biographable man, and it must surely be some obscure perception of this that lures one writer after another to the fascinating task of portraying him. Put in the most matter-of-fact way, the impression created by the lives of Hawthorne is that he is a pathological case; and this view of him has the support of the closely parallel impression made by his books. Who has not felt, in reading these singular masterpieces, the suggestion they carry as of the experiences of dreams, in which we follow with an intense and wondering interest the sayings and doings of people who are alike in only one respect—that they all have something left out? It is probably vain to ask whether there was really some such fact in Hawthorne's physiology, that set up in the people of his books the mysterious and sprite-like deficiency of human nature which meets us in one and all of them; but there is no avoiding the feeling that he

personally lacked some of the connections which make up a normal human being and relate him to his kind. It comes out in the most irresistible way on an early page of Mr. Conway's most interesting little book, where he quotes from a hitherto unpublished manuscript account of Hawthorne's early life, by his sister-in-law, Elizabeth Peabody. Hawthorne, she tells (what was before known), early wrote a number of tales, most of which he destroyed; and she adds: "He said some of these were perhaps the most powerful things he had written, but he felt they were *morbid*. And he remarked that when he found, on re-reading anything, that it had not the healthiness of nature, he felt as if he had been guilty of a lie. He was not sure he had burnt all that deserved that fate." It is only the last sentence that makes one quite satisfied of the accuracy of Miss Peabody's reminiscence—indeed Mr. Conway notes that she goes astray on some points. For what phrase can be less descriptive of Hawthorne's work from beginning to end than that of the "healthiness of nature"? How does his work ever suggest that, save by its profound presentment of the opposite condition, of the pathological? If Hawthorne himself did not realise this, which however he in many utterances seems to do, we can but decide more emphatically that his strange power of abnormal imagination was conditional on his lack of some of the normal qualities of gregarious man. And indeed he avows this lack so distinctly in one letter to Longfellow, quoted by Mr. Conway, that we can hardly believe he did not see its significance.

"By some witchcraft or other," he writes, during his early seclusion in Salem, "for I cannot really assign any reasonable why and wherefore—I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again. Since we last met . . . I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing. . . . I have made a captive of myself, and put me into a dungeon, and now I cannot find the key to let myself out—and if the door were open, I should be almost afraid to come out." It is impossible, surely, to deny that we are dealing with pathological symptoms—symptoms which are traceable in the accounts of his melancholy father, and of his daughter Una, whose golden hair grew grey before her death at thirty-three.

We can but, then, agree to differ with Mr. Conway when he opposes himself (p. 84) to "those who have imagined the nature of Hawthorne to be unsocial". But indeed Mr. Conway only establishes that view when he attributes to Hawthorne "a desire for such fellowship as would leave undisturbed the inner sanctuary where his heart and intellect sat at their sacred task". There is a wealth of humanity and human-fellowship in Mr. Conway's own nature which makes him perhaps less sensitive than other people to insufficiencies of these qualities in the writers he admires. Wherever he goes, and on whomsoever he writes, be it Wesley, Carlyle, Browning, Hawthorne, Shelley, or Emerson, he finds and exhibits what is most attractive, and tolerantly puts aside the rest. There is something too rare and too admirable in this

to be made a ground of anything like protest ; but one must take leave to choose other words than his for the specification of Hawthorne's traits. Generally he presents these traits with the finest faithfulness, though I have not noticed that he mentions some strong ones given by Mr. Lathrop, such as Hawthorne's early habit of having his food set down at his locked door, and so avoiding even taking his meals with the family. After all, there is nothing in the matter that need arouse unkindly feeling : we are dealing with an abnormal case, and have just to take account of the facts. There is, however, a tendency to the opposite extreme from unsympathetic censure in Mr. Conway's repeated allusions to the "sacred task", and in some things he quotes from Dr. Loring, now U.S. Minister in Portugal, who was one of Hawthorne's intimates and one of his earliest admirers. Dr. Loring puts it that Hawthorne "had a two-fold existence—a real and a supernatural". "He was fond of the companionship of all who were in sympathy with the real and human side of life." But "it was the supernatural element in Hawthorne which gave him his high distinction. . . . He was shy of those whose intellectual power and literary fame might seem to give them a right to enter his sanctuary. The working of his mind was so sacred and mysterious to him, that he was impatient of any attempt at familiarity, or even intimacy with the divine power within him." It may be permitted to say that this savors excessively of American transcendentalism ; in other words, that it will not do. There is no use

in quarrelling with a man for being constituted as he is when his power of ministering to us depends on his peculiarities ; but it is best in the long run to admit that he is unsocial when he plainly is so, and not to fall back on the vocabulary of the pulpit by way of vindicating him. Theodore Parker said to Dr. Loring that Hawthorne was "true to nature in spite of himself". In a sense that may be right : there is a truth to nature in those tales in which Poe so firmly and finely reproduced the visions of a flawed brain ; and Hawthorne was presenting Nature as he saw her in his wonderful retrospective imagination : still we come back to the objective fact that Nature for him is not the Nature of the mass of men ; that he exhibits that with a hiatus, a something left out, as in the people of our dreams, and consequently with an effect of the mystical and non-natural. This is not a censure but a definition ; and our sense of Hawthorne's absolutely unique genius for vitalising the remote and the shadowy, and divining the secrets of a withered world, will be the more just when we realise that with such a rare quality must go a certain defect. For if we are going to be strictly critical, as Mr. Conway himself becomes when he faces the problem in detail, we must pronounce that some of Hawthorne's characters are the result of no great effort of mind or analysis. Mr. Conway is unable to see much merit in the sketch of Judge Pyncheon ; and, though some of us may there demur, who will say that there is either truth or deep imagination in the conception of Roger Chillingworth ? That figure is



emphatically the creation of a mind which had brooded more on its own projections than on the play of life in the actual world; and Hawthorne nearly always fails when he seeks to do what some of his countrymen and countrywomen do so well—present the normal villager as he lives and moves and has his being. "Outside of their families," writes Mr. Conway of Hawthorne and his bride, "the author appears never to have known any lady except the one he asked to become his wife, and it is probable that she was much in the same case as regards the male sex." And we learn from Dr. Loring that it was only with great difficulty that Hawthorne could be got to be intimate with the Peabodys, who were not the only intellectual people near him with whom a man of genius might have found congenial society. The same story is told in the smiling comment of Emerson, "Hawthorne rides well his black courser of the night," after an evening in which Hawthorne sat silent amid much stimulating talk.

Yet withal Mr. Conway shows us that the shy and unsocial man was much loved by his intimates. Perhaps his wife's devotion may have over-colored the picture (p. 103) of the affection shown for him by Horatio Bridge and Franklin Pierce, on which she exclaims, "How his friends do love him!" Hawthorne himself said a sharp thing about Pierce's friendship, for which, as Mr. Conway very justly decides, he lowered his literary standards. Mr. Conway's right feeling comes out strikingly, by the way, in his grave yet tolerant account of Hawthorne's

extremely repellent attitude on the slavery question—an attitude which might well alienate such a friend of liberty as Mr. Conway, and which seems to have turned a good many people from Hawthorne in his life, as it well might. The same temperate justice marked the pages which deal with Hawthorne's striking failure to come into any living relationship with England during his long residence there; a failure which emphasises our sense of the something lacking in his personality. But to the last we see friends cleaving to him; and to the last Mr. Conway makes us follow with revived interest the course of that elusive mind, which seems to fascinate us by its negative qualities as the man seems to have done his friends by the impression he gave of latent power.

Mr. Conway, whose knowledge of contemporary literary life in England and America is perhaps unequalled, gives us many novel items of information. Hawthorne, he mentions, once told him "that he did not meet a certain author in London because of her irregular marriage". The author in question must be George Eliot. But Mr. Conway admits that on re-reading 'The Scarlet Letter' he has had "misgivings that I may have misunderstood him"; and he gives from Mrs. Bray an account of how Hawthorne talked to her "exclusively about Miss Evans" at a dinner-party; so that there may have been a misunderstanding. It would indeed be strange if the genius which wrought such a miracle of more than Shakspearean sympathy as the central portrait in the 'Scarlet Letter' should have fallen into line with the

ethics of the Puritan Philistine in such a case as that of George Eliot. May not Hawthorne have meant to say that George Eliot's position, involving as it did some social ostracism, prevented him from meeting her at other people's houses, as in Washington one *cannot* meet the most distinguished colored men *because* of their color? No such doubt attaches to the view here given us, from personal knowledge, of the relations of Hawthorne to Emerson, whose shrinking from the morbid kept him always unappreciative of his friend's peculiar genius. This and a number of other items serve to bring us into fresh acquaintance with Hawthorne's world, and thus, as far as may be, with Hawthorne. The book, therefore, is one which no one interested in the subject can afford to miss. In a series which of necessity deals mainly with writers who are to be known only through other books, it brings an element of fresh personal witness and an atmosphere of new knowledge.

## MR. W. E. HENLEY.

### I.—‘A BOOK OF VERSES.’

(1888.)

THE appearance, a year ago, of Mr. Gleeson White's compact but copious collection of ‘Ballades and Rondeaux’, ‘Chants Royal’, ‘Sestinas’, ‘Villanelles’, etc., seemed to not a few of its many readers a very notable “sign of the times” in matters literary, though it was not easy to say offhand what it amounted to. The fact that within fifteen years more than two hundred writers of English verse had taken to the production of what they themselves regarded as “exotic” forms of poetry, and had turned out among them some thousands of samples—this was certainly an unprecedented phase of literary fashion; and it pointed at least to strong forces of change, whatever might be their outcome. There were not wanting, of course, verdicts that the new tendencies were the beginning of the end of English verse properly so called; that our poetry was becoming played out—or that our poets were; and that this harking back to old and highly artificial French forms meant the advent of a new era of mechanical and constrained art, a sort of later Popeism, of which the musical sense was a trifle more sophisticated, but the intellectual grasp and moral ambition even narrower and slighter than those of the eighteenth century. English poetry, in short, was declared by some to be going to the dogs. Need-

less to say, this was a very hasty inference: a great historic art does not go to the dogs so easily as all that. The very suddenness and vogue of the new departure, indeed, implied transiency, it being in the nature of any decisive intellectual change, even in these progressive days, to come about gradually. And there is clearly no abiding-place for poetic energy at all in the pagoda of the archaic-artificial, of which the cells are fitted up only for a day's hide-and-seek. It is perhaps rash to make the suggestion without statistical research, but one ventures to surmise that the very issue of Mr. White's little volume has abated the zest of the versifiers who furnished him with his matter; that in the next fifteen years we shall have only a dwindling production of the exotics in question—at least on the part of the abler producers. A stroll through one such anthology seems enough to sate any reasonably robust taste for the "Gallic bonds" of which Mr. White, in a prose hardly Gallic, hopes to help to effect the "complete naturalisation in our tongue".

But the outburst of artificialism, we are all agreed, signifies something; and it seems worth while to note what that is. On the face of the matter it is an aspiration towards form, towards measure and completeness, towards concision, even if the seduction of experiment often lead to the mere dilution of one grain of motive with the required glassful of words. There is implied in such experiment a recoil from indeterminate and rambling utterance; and this is perhaps as large a part of the total impulse as the

hankering of the ear for the chimes of repetitive verse, well described by Dr. George MacDonald, but exemplified in his own work by some rather factitious trifling. Now, such a reaction must needs tend to express itself, as it *can* only be expressed satisfyingly, in art forms which shall permit of the higher æsthetic effects aimed at, while avoiding those cheaper if more promptly attractive features that are really æsthetic limitations, keeping almost the whole mass of Mr. White's collection on a plane of effect finally felt to be inferior to that of much other poetry. In short, the same instincts or tendencies which have yielded the multitude of artificial verse-forms are bound to show forth also in specifically free forms, were it only because, as Shakspeare has gone so far to prove, the freest verse-form allows the maximum of concision. And when there appears, from the hand of one of the most industrious\* of the formalists represented in the 'Canterbury' collection, a volume of the most remarkable of recent verse, specially characterised by successful resort to free forms, those who apprehended a decline of poetic power from the spread of the other fashion may once for all be reassured.

Mr. W. E. Henley, whose little 'Book of Verses' has created such an impression, figures in the ballade volume rather as a copious and facile than as a subtle artist. Such poetic effects of the finer kind as may

\* It is to be noted in the same connection that another of the formalists, Mr. H. C. Bunner of New York, has produced some of the most genuine of recent poetry in his 'Airs from Arcady and Elsewhere'.

there be met with are absent, I think, from his contributions, which almost invariably savor of clever dilettantism rather than of poetic impulse, though they prove an uncommon gift of sheer vocabulary and versification. But in his own 'Book of Verses' he leaves the whole content of the formalist anthology behind, in point alike of inspiration and accomplishment, as if his share in that had been but so much pastime—as indeed it purported to be. His inartificial verse (to use a roughly but conveniently distinguishing term, which must not be understood to concede that the verse in question is produced without much art) may indeed offend the very tastes which condemn the artificial revival; but it is hardly possible that any taste will pronounce it lacking in intellectual content or ballast. With ample skill and ease in rhyme, he yet makes up the most important section of his book largely of verse that is unrhymed, and, to a considerable extent, even irregular. This section—'In Hospital: Rhymes and Rhythms'—is in many ways the most noteworthy body of poetry that has appeared in this country for a long time. Whether or not Mr. Henley would call himself a Realist is not certain; but it is at least clear that he is not one of the Unrealists. He has here produced twenty-nine short poems wholly from his experiences in the Old Edinburgh Infirmary, where he was a patient in 1873-75, reproducing almost every phase of the hospital life:—the first impression on entrance; that of the waiting-room and the interior; the states of mind before operation and after; the

sick vigil; portraits of the different types of nurse, old and new, and lady probationer; the round of the clinical Professor with his students; sketches of patients and cases, of 'The Chief' and the house-surgeon, of the attendants, of visitors, of the "apparition" of a friend, now recognised by all the world as one R.L.S.; with interludes of expression of the patient's personal moods. The mere enumeration of the motives is enough to set many asking, "But is this poetry?" and the emphatic answer is, Yes. It is no more prose in its temper than in its form: it is at once selective and artistic, lyric and rhythmic, transmuting every fact into a thing emotionally perceived, so that the reader has not only the data but the poet's impression bound up with them, and this always given in words which make the whole an artistic possession, something more than a mere report, because stamped with a beauty which the fact had not. Take, by way of the most emphatic possible challenge to the conventional notion of poetic beauty and poetic subject, the closing lines of the poem describing the round of the operating and teaching Professor among the beds. The Professor has passed on from a case, and

"Now one can see  
Case Number One  
Sits (rather pale) with his bed-clothes  
Stripped up, and showing his foot  
(Alas for God's image!)  
Swaddled in wet, white lint  
Brilliantly hideous with red."

Here is an episode which one cannot read of without



wincing, which to have seen would have been an un-mixedly painful impression ; and yet, while there is no softening or evasion of the shock, the verse remains a thing to which we return for its success of artistic statement—a success exactly analogous to that of the actor or actress who moves us to pain by the simulation of mental pain or physical weakness, and yet at the same instant gives us pleasure by the secure skill and fidelity of the imitation. So with another sufficiently unpromising subject, charm is won from the most meagre motive by the sheer vividness with which a nervous impression is retained and reproduced :—

“ NOCTURN.

- “ At the barren heart of midnight,  
When the shadow shuts and opens  
As the loud flames pulse and flutter,  
I can hear a cistern leaking.
- “ Dripping, dropping, in a rhythm,  
Rough, unequal, half-melodious,  
Like the measures aped from nature  
In the infancy of music ;
- “ Like the buzzing of an insect,  
Still, irrational, persistent, . . . .  
I must listen, listen, listen  
In a passion of attention ;
- “ Till it taps upon my heartstrings,  
And my very life goes dripping,  
Dropping, dripping, drip-drip-dropping,  
In the drip-drop of the cistern.”

Naturalism in minutiae could hardly go further ; but though one or two critics have announced their inability to see any merit in such work, it may be predicted that it will win the ear not only of most

people who have a feeling both for verse and for psychological observation, but of a posterity which will be still more highly evolved in these matters. To do with seeming ease a thing that the instructed judgment knows to be difficult—this is at all times one of the credentials of mastery. And if Mr. Henley can thus succeed with motives specifically unpromising, no less is he equal to more fruitful opportunities. His sketch of the sick ploughman, reminiscent of his youthful love-conquests; the sonnets on 'The Chief' and the Nurses; the powerfully terse account of a tragic "casualty"; the 'Ave Cæsar' from the sufferer musing on death; the tremulous joy of his return to the outer world—all have the same certainty of touch and directness of insight and of manner. The outer and the inner fact, the phenomenon and its philosophy, are always perfectly synthesised. In the 'Vigil' the maddening microscopic noises of the sleepless night are blent with the sick man's memories:—

"All the old time  
Surges malignant before me;  
Old voices, old kisses, old songs  
Blossom derisive about me;  
While the new days  
Pass me in endless procession:  
A pageant of shadows  
Silently, leeringly wending  
On . . . . and still on . . . . still on;"

and so in the sonnet of 'The Chief', the firmly and felicitously drawn portrait is backgrounded by the vision of the universal life:—

"We hold him for another Herakles,

Battling with custom, prejudice, disease,  
As once the son of Zeus with Death and Hell."

In short, if any one would realise the gain to poetry from a competent resort to living motive, in the full faith that the actual is always conquerable by art, he may find a more convincing demonstration in Mr. Henley's book than in almost any verse of the current generation. Beside Epics of Hades, versifications of Buddhist mythology, blank verse tragedies and rhymed romances, all steeped in archaism alike of thought and phrase, this handful of impressions from a grey corner of actual life stands out vital and magnetic, as much more truly poetic than those other performances as it is more readable. If it does not live by this merit, some of us are far astray in our forecasts of literary destiny. Similar things have been attempted before: the spirit of the eighteenth century, in its recoil from the sterile extravagance in which the genius of the sixteenth and seventeenth had been finally lost, was at last ready enough to attempt transcription from everyday life, doing without theory what Wordsworth later felt led to do by theory—but faring no better. It was wrecked either on the Scylla of unfelt diction or in the Charybdis of a factitious epic ambition. If a last-century poet had tried (as probably some did) to reproduce such a train of experience as Mr. Henley's in hospital, he would have made it a formal poem in several books, as his congeners did with so many themes, manufacturing pseud-epics on the Grave, the Sabbath, the Course of Time, the Pleasures of Imagination, and

so forth, and so whelming a pinch of prose sense in a flood of thin rhetoric. If, on the other hand, one of that tribe had gone about to versify a single one of Mr. Henley's hospital motives, he would have first of all adjusted his voice to a funereal falsetto, and his mien to something suggested by the theatre; and the result would be an abortive discourse in frigid cadences and cracked rhymes, with some such title as those in which Shenstone, in his way, outdid the *niaiseries* of the coming Wordsworth—"Elegy xviii.: He repeats the song of Collin, a discerning shepherd, lamenting the state of the woollen manufactory"; "Elegy xxvi: Describing the sorrow of an ingenuous mind, on the melancholy event of a licentious amour." But just as surely as affectation and falsetto are fated to oblivion, is the clear note of personality and nature destined to endure. The comparative lyric naturalness of Collins's 'Evening' Ode, as beside the typical laborious artifice of his popular contemporaries, suffices to retain for him an esteem higher than is due to his best performance on its intrinsic merits; and even his lucklessly-titled 'Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands', which with the rest could find no readers on its publication, finds sympathetic critics to-day.

The name of Collins recalls us to the point that Mr. Henley exhibits not only a resort to fresh motive, but a movement towards free rhymeless forms, all the more noteworthy because made by a writer who achieves charming successes in various staves of rhyme. Among his 'Hospital' rhythms we have un-

rhymed quatrains, closed and unclosed, in the trochaics of 'Hiawatha',—quatrains, that is, like those of Heine's 'Atta Troll', a very different thing from a continuous movement in the same measure, be it noted;—quatrains in a sapphic movement with another than the sapphic close; stanzas such as this:—

"The gaunt brown walls  
Look infinite in their decent meanness,  
There is nothing of home in the noisy kettle,  
The fulsome fire;"

and, perhaps most important of all, a number of pieces in the short, irregular blank verse, of which two extracts are given above. Verse of this kind has already been made classic for us by Mr. Arnold, who, indeed, managed it sometimes to very pedestrian purpose, but at others succeeded with it in a degree above praise and above rivalry. Arnold presumably had it from Goethe, who, in some dozen or more pieces, handles it with at least his average energy; and by Heine, who, in his early 'Nordsee' collection, writes it with more suppleness than Goethe, but also, perhaps, with less pregnancy, and who later found that regular blank rhythms better emphasised his rare gift of phrase. It is in such verse as this that the essentials of poetic art are best tested; and the chances are that most foreign readers have paid less heed to it in Goethe and Heine than to their regular and rhymed verse, because only a perfect sense of all the shades of verbal association could ensure perfect pleasure in it, even if its success were technically complete. Rhyme and measure

carry many a lame dog over many a stiff stile. It would be out of place here to discuss the relation of Goethe's and Heine's irregular verse to later German poetry; but it is impossible to avoid speculating on the chances of a following to Arnold's and Mr. Henley's lead. The latter, perhaps, is not entirely uninfluenced by Whitman, though he is always rhythmical, which Whitman, to put it mildly, is generally not. Now, this coincidence of artistically-corrected and accomplished Whitmanism of style, with what we may term, without forgetting Mr. Henley's originality, Whitmanism of motive, does seem much more prophetic of coming developments than the eruption of French formalism. Whitman has certainly now impressed himself on the mind of his time; and it seems just as clear that he is at bottom right in his message (apart from his practice) of free rhythm, as that he is wrong in anticipating a mere poetic exodus from the bondage of verse into the prairie of prose. Nothing can be idler, looking to the data, than Mr. Swinburne's characteristic protest that avoidance of rhyme in song is an unwise renunciation of a natural grace: Tennyson's rhymeless 'Tears, idle Tears', is as exquisite a song as any he has written, to say nothing of those of Mr. Swinburne; but one has only to read Mr. Henley to see that the "heaven of prose" can never yield quite the atmosphere of the region of poesy, and that what men are likely to do is not to give up verse, but to recreate it. Rhyme could not, but neither could prose, yield just the kind of vibration that comes from these lines of Mr. Henley's

—not taken, it need hardly be said, from the ‘Hospital’ section of his book:—

“The Spirit of Wine  
Sang in my glass, and I listened  
With love to his odorous music,  
His flushed and magnificent song.”

Who does not feel that here rhythm as well as diction goes to produce the total effect? It is only when he becomes really rhythmical that Whitman so moves us; and the energetic and intelligent Whitmanism of Mr. Edward Carpenter, though he is no mere echo of the master he so devotedly imitates, yields nothing that similarly lays hold of memory. Not that way, probably, is the stream of tendency heading.

Nay, it would be a poor compliment to Mr. Henley’s admirable work in rhyme to decide that even his success in freer forms ought to promote the abandonment of that: it does but prove that we may progress outside rhyme as well as in it. Few readers will want a change in the ringing poem from which one favorably inclined critic selected this stanza with a deprecating allusion to the “crudity” of its terms:—

“In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.”

Need it be demonstrated that these verses can be crude only to an imperfect man of letters; and that they really illustrate the primary principle, once for all set forth, and so often exemplified, by Horace,

that the skilful contexture of an old term in a new application is a special literary felicity—

“Dixeris egregiè, notum si callida verbum  
Reddiderit junctura novum”—?

The only sort of “crudity” I can find in Mr. Henley is a solitary nefarious rhyme, bad enough for him certainly, but still one of those crimes which are so much less fatal in art than blunders.

No, with Emerson be it repeated, we are not yet done with rhyme; and the reader of Mr. Henley’s delectable little book (of which the honorable cheapness is only relatively a small merit) will find in it half a dozen other perfect successes in that kind, which may not here find quoting space. Even in the ‘Bric-à-Brac’ section, made up of French forms, which the author rightly places last, the few pieces that appear also in the ‘Canterbury’ anthology are the least meritorious; and the two last rondeaus of all serve to prove that a great *andante* music may be sounded even under that title. It is one of the most singular circumstances in recent literary history that a writer who had by him such a quantity of first-rate original verse should hold it back all these years (the ‘Hospital’ pieces seem all to have been written in 1873-75; some of the best of the others are also dated more than ten years back; and it does not appear that any of these have been previously published), and should then quietly play his trumps after the reading world had been reasonably entitled, from what he did casually publish, to conclude that he was a clever manipulator of verse forms, but no



poet. It is, finally, one more refutation of Mr. Lowell's strange dictum that there can be only one kind of poetry. Here we have the quickly faded poetry of technical trifling as well as the poetry of rhythmical and beautiful treatment of winning and high themes, and rhythmical and admirable treatment of themes that in themselves would never be thought high or winning. Each has its specific ministry and charm, and one declines to believe that any reader can be insensible to all, independent as they are of any of the deductions here suggested concerning the sort of art developments they seem to forecast. On that head it only remains to utter the hope that Mr. Henley will find some fresh inspiration without having to bear again those "bludgeonings of chance" which drew from him such "melodious pain".

## II.—MR. HENLEY AS A CRITIC.

(*'VIEWS AND REVIEWS.'*)

(1890.)

In one of the little sections of his pretty little book of little criticisms, here under notice, Mr. W. E. Henley has some just if trite observations on the shock of surprise which comes of reading an orator's speech in print after the spell of his eloquence has gone off. Less often remarked upon, perhaps, but no less real, is the shock that sometimes comes of reading the argumentative or expository prose of a writer of brilliant verse. No new poetry of recent years has had a better-deserved welcome than has

been given to Mr. Henley's 'Book of Verses'; and the admirers of that memorable little volume could not but be prepared to enjoy a volume of prose from the same hand—prepared, that is, to find originality and power in the author's work in one medium as in the other. It is so difficult to keep always in view the psychological fact that the maker of good verse is primarily an artist in words and rhythms, and only by chance, so to speak, a sound or penetrating thinker. A certain nicety of critical taste, indeed, must almost necessarily belong to a man who is himself a gifted artist; but beyond that, your poet's judgment on life and things may touch any standard from Marlowe's to Mr. Alfred Austin's, from Collins's or Cowper's to Southey's or Mr. Swinburne's. And Mr. Henley's volume of re-arranged journalistic judgments, while exhibiting so far as a prose volume may the literary accomplishments which marked his book of verses, is a forcible reminder that skill in verse is no security for philosophic depth or breadth in criticism of books and men.

His collection of 'Views and Reviews' is, he modestly explains, "less a book than a mosaic of scraps and shreds recovered from the shot rubbish of some fourteen years of journalism"; but he ventures all the same "to hope that the result, for all its scrappiness, will be found to have that unity which comes of method and an honest regard for letters". Well, there need be no question about the honest regard for letters: there can indeed be no more question about honesty between critics than of truthfulness between

members of Parliament in the House. The claim is too vague for discussion. If Mr. Henley professes to be at all times anxiously on his guard against literary injustice, it will not stand, for he is often headlong, prejudiced, and capricious; but this is too common a failing in critics to put him outside the class of respectable practitioners. When, however, he claims to have a "method" which unifies his work, a denial will be in order, and it must be made. He has no method whatever. A method, in any serious sense of the term, implies a comprehensive scheme of discrimination, with permanent tests and intelligible standards, by which any given judgment can be explained and related to other judgments. But Mr. Henley may safely be defied to state any method which will account logically and connectedly for even his first two papers—those on Dickens and Thackeray. The second begins with the remark that "it is odd to note how opinions differ as to the greatness of Thackeray and the value of his books". In reality there is nothing odder in that than in the difference of opinion about anybody else—say Dickens, whom Mr. Henley maintains to be Thackeray's superior, as some young men are found to do in their debating society days, but seldom later in life. Here is a problem well worth solving by a method, but Mr. Henley's course is simply to praise Dickens very highly for some things and blame him for others, in both cases without any rendering of reasons; while he does the same for Thackeray, only blaming at much greater length and praising less.

This book reveals that Mr. Henley is the startling critic who some years ago, in the *Athenaeum*, called Dickens the "greater artist" of the two. He has readjusted many of his criticisms; but it has not occurred to him to give anything like a connected set of reasons for this judgment, in which he is almost alone among trained literary men. And one sees clearly enough that there is no reasoning in the matter. Mr. Henley smilingly quotes Mr. Lang's dictum that "every Englishman who can read, unless he be an Ass, is a reader the more" for Dickens, remarking pertinently enough that it gives one pause "to reflect that the writer of this charming eulogy can only read the half of Dickens, and is half the ideal of his own denunciation". But Mr. Henley for his part can only tell us that he admires much in Dickens that Mr. Lang cannot endure. Mr. Lang likes only the grotesques; Mr. Henley likes these too, but further reverences such studies as Bradley Headstone, Jonas Chuzzlewit, and Eugene Wrayburn; and with a magistral deliverance to that effect he disposes of the subject. On the other hand he tells you that the anti-Thackerayans "look at his (Thackeray's) favorite heroines—at Laura and Ethel and Amelia; and they can but think him stupid who could ever have believed them interesting or admirable or attractive or true". That is how Mr. Henley proves and persuades; and what need anyone do with such a critic but dismiss him in his own fashion? Sooth to say, his treatment of Thackeray is wilfully unjudicial in large measure. He has been ruffled, perhaps,

by a good deal of the novelist's work ; but all that is quite clear is that he is specially ruffled by some of Thackeray's youthful criticisms, which are certainly objectionable enough. On the strength of the raw young Englishman's impertinences and blunders about Berlioz and other Frenchmen of that time, Mr. Henley, who reveres Berlioz, sums the novelist up as representing in all his work "the Gentlemanly Interest". "He was the average clubman *plus* genius and a style". After Mr. Henley's example, one may take leave to call that a silly criticism. You might as truly say that Shakspeare is the average playwright *plus* genius and a style. In each case there has been said precisely nothing. Mr. Henley shows, too, that he knows better than he writes. He praises even to excess Thackeray's style, pronouncing it one of the finest in literature ; and allows him "admirable sketches of habit and manners". On the other hand, we have the admission that Dickens "had many and grave faults. But"—so writes our methodic critic—"so had Sir Walter and the good Dumas ; so, to be candid, had Shakspeare himself—Shakspeare the king of poets !" It is just the criticism of the average clubman, with no perceptible genius, though certainly Mr. Henley has a style. There is not a gleam of real light in these two pretentious little papers, smartly written as they are, on the question of what constitutes great art in fiction ; not a glimpse of a scientific analysis or comparison. When Thackeray is called cruel on the strength of some of his caricatures, you simply feel that Mr. Henley

wants to "have his knife in". What can be more literally heartless than, say, Dickens's sketch of the dinner-party at the Veneerings', where you have a set of grimacing waxworks presented to you as human beings? In Thackeray's most pitiless caricatures there is always the breath of life, because he always saw people as organisms; whereas Dickens half the time saw them as grotesque lay figures. But it is almost irrelevant to urge these things in deprecation of Mr. Henley's decisions. He has encouraged us to adopt the simpler course of calling them stupid.

When his book is read through it becomes apparent not only that he has not a method, but that he cannot have one. The paper on Disraeli gives us his mental measure very conveniently. We have here a judgment of that great Master of the Bogus from the standpoint of—well, just the Gentlemanly Interest. To Mr. Henley, Disraeli is a great student and painter of 'Men and Women', with capitals, as well as a brilliant epigrammatist; and the Beaconsfieldian statesmanship moves our belletrist to facile enthusiasm. Being a man of good taste and personal endowment in the matter of style, he cannot but see that Disraeli often wrote quite vilely; and he is even fair enough to remark on Mr. Gladstone's superiority in point of public (as distinct from private) magnetism. But a number of vulgarisms which in any writer on the other political side would have moved Mr. Henley to indiscriminating contempt are here tolerably brushed aside as coming from "the Great Earl"; and Mr. Gladstone's inferiority in epigram

is for Mr. Henley apparently a decisive political test. On the political question we have this summing-up, in the closing section—for Mr. Henley makes sections, with careful rubrics and an entertaining air of pose, where other men make paragraphs.

“Fruits fall, and love dies, and time ranges; and only the whipper-snapper (that fool of time) endureth for ever. Molière knew him well, and he said that Molière was a liar and a thief. And Disraeli knew him too, and he said that in these respects Disraeli and Molière were brothers. That he said so matters as little now as ever it did; for though the whipper-snapper is immortal in kind, he is nothing if not futile and ephemeral in effect, and it was seen long since that Disraeli, as became his genius and his race, was the Uncommonplace incarnate, the anti-thesis of Grocerdom, the Satan of that revolt against the yielding habit of Jehovah-Bottles the spirit whereof is fast coming to be our only defence against Socialism and the dominion of the common fool. . . . He knew that it is the function of the man of genius to show that theory is only theory, and that in the House of Morality there are many mansions. To that end he lived and died; and it is not until one has comprehended the complete significance of his life and death that one is qualified to speak with understanding of such a life and death as his who passed at Khartoum.”

Is not this just the Whipper-snapper himself, in his most exquisite pose? Is it not his choicest technique? To bracket Molière and Disraeli, and the Socialist and the Common Fool, and to make out the anti-Disraelian the maligner of Molière—be not these the persuasive arts of the young man about town—shall we say, *plus* a style? And how pleasing is the skill with which Grocerdom is flatteringly flouted with its very own ideals—the very Disraeli and Gordon whom alone in recent years it has singled out for its

enthusiastic worship—the music-hall and the Lord Mayor and Aldermen joining hands in the cult, under the aegis of the *Daily Telegraph*! It may be doubted whether Disraeli himself ever did a finer piece of Bogus than these apophthegms about theory being only theory, and the House of Morality containing many mansions. But it is not at all doubtful that Mr. Henley, with his Disraelian pose and his music-hall sentimentalism, is about as good an authority on the serious issues of national life as Scott was on metaphysics or Dickens on the nebular hypothesis. And it almost follows that he cannot be an authoritative critic, for to be that a man must have some gift of seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. A thin top-dressing of belletrist culture, such as constitutes Mr. Henley's critical preparation, may, on some soils, indeed, yield dainty little fruits enough in the way of style, and of refined if capricious taste within a small range. These Mr. Henley exhibits. His prose technique presents much of the merit, one may say the genius of his verse; it has vividness, freshness, concision, boldness, and felicity in epithet. It has indeed plenty of small vices as well, and can even lapse at times into mere bungling. For instance: "That he was not in scarce any sense an artist is but too clear" (p. 175)—"Not the Great Pyramid itself is more solidly built nor more incapable of ruin" (p. 222). Sometimes it is almost unintelligible through ellipsis; sometimes cheapened by noise and glare. It has fixed modisms of grammar, such as "them that" for "those who"; and is not



seldom over-precious, as in the phrase "marmoreally emphatic", applied to Landor, and in the picture of "a space of shining and fragrant clarity", which shows that, though he praises the judgment of Voltaire, the critic is deaf to the sage's advice about not letting the adjective injure the noun. Worst of all, his style is too often slovenly and tawdry in metaphor, as when Hugo is called a "*poseur* of the purest water", and his Alexandrines are credited with the "leap and sparkle of sea waves and the sound of clashing swords, and the colors of sunset and the dawn"—as if the sound of clashing swords were agreeable. Then we have such a splash as this, on the poetry of Sidney: "You have as it were a casket of finest gold elaborately wrought and embellished, and the gem within is a mere spangle of taste, a trumpety spikelet of crystal. No doubt there is *a man's heart beating underneath. . . .*" But even in this *bévue* we see the artist in words; and such pieces of finished eulogy and description as the papers on Herrick and Walton and the 'Arabian Nights' are very pretty reading indeed. It is when we look at the book as a body of professedly methodic and would-be authoritative criticism that we feel its thinness and smallness. It is not even to be called a collection of "appreciations"—that would imply the comparative method; and Mr. Henley has no glimpse of that, but just praises his Dumas and girds at his George Eliot and his Jeffries as his native tastes move him. The very style bewrays him. It never has a level passage of reflection or quiet ex-

position or cool argument ; it is always febrile, stimulated, self-conscious. Even Mr. Stevenson, who has original ideas where Mr. Henley has only keen tastes and violent likes and dislikes, can—or once could—at times weary a reader of his essays by a too continuous snap and sparkle of expression ; and when Mr. Henley is merely shallow or unjust, as he so often is, his nervous excitement of speech strengthens the impression of his want of weight. Like so many light weights, he is fond of summing up “the age”, and in one of these generalisations he speaks of a “condition of intellectual impotence but poorly redeemed by a habit of artistic swagger”. The phrase hits himself pretty hard, as do the further deliverances that the age is “given over much to clamorous devotion and extravagant repudiation” ; and that “the present is an age of sentiment : its ideals and ambitions are mainly emotional ; what it chiefly loves is romance or the affectation of romance, passion, self-conscious solemnity, and a certain straining after picturesque effects”. For “age” read “book”, and you have a dreadfully accurate account of ‘Views and Reviews’. It certainly represents the “age” of its author’s imagination. With all his uneasy flings at the bourgeoisie, he is soundly bourgeois in the majority of his tastes, loving Dickens, Dumas, Longfellow, Disraeli, Gordon, Byron ; and he takes Tolstoy’s philosophy quite as respectfully as does the average young lady. But where we began by remembering, we must not end by forgetting, that the journalist of the ‘Views and Reviews’ is the writer of

the 'Book of Verses'. The latter is likely to live, and that none the less because the poet in his prose showed that, like so many other poets, he was not to be depended on or looked up to as a judge or a thinker.

### III.—MR. HENLEY AS PHILOSOPHER.

Call no poet lucky till he has tried his hand at politics. The politics of poets, if you think of it, is a dismal study; and perhaps never more so than in the case of Mr. W. E. Henley, who follows up his excellent 'Book of Verses' with 'The Song of the Sword and other Poems'. All that was best and most original in the first book was produced long before Mr. Henley had become an Edinburgh Tory editor, carrying a redundant virus to the city of the *Scotsman*; and the present volume, apparently all written since, is a most significant finger-post on his later road. To be sure, we were not wholly unprepared for it. The prose volume of 'Views and Reviews', with its uneasy, anxious glitter, its flashy philosophy, its swaggering politics, its door-slamming criticism, and its general unconvincing emphasis, was a strong reminder that the artistic gift is no security for judgment or insight. The style was, indeed, an artist's—with lapses: the thought was post-prandial in about the second-last degree. Next came 'Lyra Heroica' to mark the stream of editorial tendency; so that the title of 'The Song of the Sword' has in

it nothing to surprise. But the reading of that portentous titular composition is none the less a grievous experience, setting the mind back to the political utterances of Milton, Wordsworth, Shelley, Tennyson, and Mr. Swinburne, not to mention the transient heroics of Mr. George Meredith. Shelley, with a decently good cause, is not exactly delightful on political themes; Wordsworth, with a worse cause, is naturally still less so. If ever great Shakspeare is less than great or wise, it is in his handling of concrete politics; and one would fain surmise another hand than his in certain places. All this being so, how shall Mr. Henley perform as *vates sacer* of the Later Jingoism?

The best service a critic can do Mr. Henley's book is to beg the reader to turn first of all to the four pieces termed 'London Voluntaries'. These compositions are in their way as original and at times almost as happy as the hospital verses in his first book. Their sub-titles of *Andante con moto*, *Scherzando*, and so forth, are a trifle affected; and when all is said their technique recalls the eulogium said to have been lately passed by a certain living man of letters on a certain contemporary—it is "too hellish clever". In other and feebler terms, we may say that the verbal skill is so signal, so strenuous, so obtrusive, that the reader's final satisfaction is rather that which comes specifically of wit than that which comes specifically of poetry. You are rather more dazzled than delighted. Yet so remarkable is the versification, so consummate the wording and phras-

ing, that no reader with a palate can fail to relish the unique flavor. Take this, for instance:—

“Lo! the round sun, half down the western slope—  
Seen as along an unglazed telescope—[Eh?]  
Lingers and lolls, loth to be done with day:  
Gifting the long, lean, lanky street  
And its abounding confluences of being  
With aspects generous and bland:  
Making a thousand harnesses to shine  
As with new ore from some enchanted mine,  
And every horse's coat so full of sheen  
He looks new-tailored, and every 'bus feels clean,  
And never a hansom but is worth the feeling;  
And every jeweller within the pale  
Offers a real Arabian Night for sale;  
And even the roar  
Of the strong streams of toil that pause and pour  
Eastward and westward sounds suffused—  
Seems as it were bemused  
And blurred, and like the speech  
Of lazy seas upon a lotus-eating beach—  
With this enchanted lustrousness,  
This mellow magic that (as a man's caress  
Brings back to some faded face beloved before  
A heavenly shadow of the grace it wore  
Ere the poor eyes were minded to beseech)  
Old things transfigures, and you hail and bless  
Their looks of long-lapsed loveliness once more;  
Till the sedate and mannered elegance  
Of Clement's is all tinctured with romance;  
The while the fanciful, formal, finicking charm  
Of Bride's, that madrigal in stone,  
Glows flushed and warm  
And beauteous with a beauty not its own;  
And the high majesty of Paul's  
Uplifts a voice of living light, and calls—  
Calls to his millions to behold and see  
How goodly this his London Town can be!”

This is certainly admirable verse; and certainly nobody but Mr. Henley could have written it. It is not too much to say that it shows a metrical faculty

not inferior to that seen in 'Lycidas' and 'Maud'. And there can be small question about the demoralisation, so to speak, of the poet's intellect when he puts these 'London Voluntaries', all written with this poignancy and freshness of manner and matter, in a merely second place, first banging the drum commercial in the market-place with his 'Song of the Sword'.

To put his foot through that tawdry structure of ass-skin, wood, and wind, is the imperative duty of the righteous critic, after he has called attention to the power of the poems which ought to have given the book its title. The 'Song of the Sword', to begin with, is a bad echo of Mr. Henley's own 'Spirit of Wine':—

"The Spirit of Wine  
Sang in my glass, and I listened  
With love to his odorous music,  
His flushed and magnificent song."

Now we have

"The Sword  
Singing—  
The voice of the Sword from the heart of the Sword,  
Clanging imperious  
Forth from Time's battlements  
His ancient and triumphing Song."

And if the old song odored of wine, the new smells of brandy. "Odorous music" was bacchantically bold; and Mr. Henley would have hooted anybody else who should have said it; but "Time's battlements" breathes truly of vinous courage. Thus roareth the lay:—

"In the beginning,  
Ere God inspired Himself

Into the clay thing  
Thumbed to His image,  
The vacant, the naked shell  
Soon to be Man :  
Thoughtful He pondered it,  
Prone there and impotent,  
Fragile inviting  
Attack and discomfiture :  
Then with a smile—  
As he heard in the Thunder  
That laughed over Eden  
The voice of the Trumpet,  
The iron Beneficence  
Calling his dooms  
To the Winds of the world—  
Stooping, He drew  
On the sand with his finger  
A shape for a sign  
Of His way to the eyes  
That in wonder should waken,  
For a proof of his will  
To the breaking intelligence.  
That was the birth of me :  
I am the Sword.”

Surely Mr. Henley is mistaken. Surely it is the Waverley pen, making a joyful noise after supper.\*

It is edifying to see how Mr. Henley weds theology to politics, developing symmetrically on both lines of thought. He is verily become a savory Christian, as Mr. Lang confesses of him. In his ‘Hospital’ days he was “neat but not God-y”; even talking paganly about the bludgeonings of Chance and the horror of the Shade. Now he avails himself of all the resources of the Primrose League—if indeed that devout body can quite rise to Mr. Hen-

\* [It was given to Professor Minto to make the perfect comment, “No, you are only Ancient Pistol.”]

ley's mystic heights. If it cannot, the worst that can happen will be an expurgated edition of the League's laureate; haply a post-mortem one, if his growing piety do not lead him to a reluctant repentance, even as Wordsworth's over *his* thrilling sentiment, 'Carnage is Thy Daughter'. Only the philosophical Radical is likely to suggest that Mr. Henley's theology is over-timorous; that he should have recognised the superior divinity of dynamite, and said a word for Famine—not to mention the Influenza—as well as for Fire and Slaughter; especially after Milton had shortsightedly given The Opposition the credit of gunpowder.

Let us hear another stave:—

“Heroes, my children,  
Follow, O follow me,  
Follow, exulting  
In the great light that breaks  
From the sacred companionship:  
Thrust through the fatuous,  
Thrust through the fungous brood  
Spawned in my shadow  
And gross with my gift!  
Thrust through, and hearken,  
O hark, to the Trumpet,  
The Virgin of Battles,”  
[Printer, spell rightly,  
Nor hint the Vivandière,  
Although we once spoke  
Of Jehovah-Bottles;]  
“Calling, still calling you  
Into the Presence,  
Sons of the Judgment,  
Pure wafts of the Will!”  
[Which must not be confounded  
With the willy-waucht so-called]  
“Edged to annihilate,  
Hilted with government,



Follow, O follow me  
Till the waste places  
All the grey globe over  
Ooze, as the honeycomb  
Drips, with the sweetness  
Distilled of my strength : ”

from which it appears that there is still much virtue in Scots drink. Not absinthé itself, apparently, can bring a windier war-whoop out of the flaccid *boulevardier*, fat if not fatuous, and fungous from much beer. And it ought really to be meat and drink to the philosophic mind to see how the latter-day poet, gross with the gift of Jingo journalism, can swagger it so that the real man of war, scantier of words if happily sounder of wind, stands in amaze at the columns of rhetoric reared over his simple trade of throat-cutting, with its alternations of dysentery, dragooning, and drill, and the final toss-up among death, discharge, and a pension. If the comedy of the case be rightly appreciated, it will be needless to reason out the theorem, or to ask whether the imaginary amateur of the sword, living by the bloody sweat of whitefaced laboring men, whose kind he goes about yelling to slay, is not a subject for the cat literary.

Sooth to say, Mr. Henley is not always so primitively ridiculous even in his drum-and-trumpet work. The verses ‘To R. F. B.’, if in matter just as alcoholically inspired as the ‘Song of the Sword’, are at least superlatively good rant; and in a world where religious verse is still appreciated for its art and charm by rational men, it would be unfair to treat

Mr. Henley's Rule-Britannia-ism with the mere contempt which is due to it as political doctrine. He plays the English Fee-fo-fum, indeed, in a way which leaves it impossible to think with respect of his mind ; but at least he raves like an artist, even in his poetic cups, and his lyric of 'England, my England,' is notable trombone-playing, out-blaring by a long way the 'Hands all round' of the other and older laureate. And yet the lover of literature, even if he sees no omen of wider literary decadence in Mr. Henley's particular development, cannot but sigh, or at least shrug, to see a poet thus go "the Primrose way to the everlasting bonfire", as it were. The blatant editor, whooping to the Jingoese, clanging out clap-trap from "Time's battlements" (his castle in the air) with all the resonances of an empty head, is not finally a pleasing spectacle. The pen nibbed with electioneering is no more lovely an instrument than the sword hilted with government. Neither is it agreeable to note the whilom pagan evolving a new Schopenhauerian Godism, and intoning now about "the Will", and again of "the Master", and of how

"God the Craftsman, as he walks  
The floor of His workshop, hearkens, full of cheer,  
In thus accomplishing  
The aims of His miraculous artistry."

It sets one reckoning on future verses about 'Our Lord' and "His" Gospel of Christian love—to the tune of "We don't want to fight, but by Jingo if we do!" Well, perhaps at that stage the thing will cure itself ; and the Primrose League will revolt, being

already a trifle flurried, it may be, by Mr. Henley's identification of God with the editor of the *National Observer* as regards the treatment of the problem of women's rights. And we shall still have its laureate's good verses, which are as good as his clap-trap is despicable.

## MR. ANDREW LANG.

### I.—‘GRASS OF PARNASSUS.’

(1888.)

MR. ANDREW LANG has chosen to put in the forefront of his collection of old and new verses the section ‘Deeds of Men’, wherein, acting on a theory of art which he has been commonly understood to reject, he “drops into politics”, *à propos* of the everlasting Gordon, the Australian contingent, and the death of Colonel Burnaby. Mr. Lang’s political creed is short, simple, and familiar. He believes in a necessary death-conflict between this country and Russia, and therefore specially regrets the death of Colonel Burnaby in the Egyptian imbroglio—“this quarrel,” as the poet terms it—thinking it had been meeter for the colonel to meet his end in “that dreadful battle drawing nigh, to thunder through the Afghan passes sheer,” as the rhyme somewhat painfully runs. But to the poet’s statesman-soul some comfort comes from the fact that the Australian colonies “rally to the English war” in Egypt, and face the “foemen in the gate”; and we accordingly have a copy of precariously vigorous verses: ‘Advance, Australia. On the offer of help from the Australians after the fall of Khartoum.’ As regards Gordon, however, there is of course no comfort; and the bard, concerned over no scene in the world’s per-

petual tragedy save the episode at Khartoum, returns to that again and yet again, affecting a Miltonic strain of gloom over the pettiness of the political life which contrives to continue after the hero has disappeared. This is the kind of relation to the problems of human destiny which to-day serves a chosen band of sentimentalists for humanitarian relief to the cultivation of factitious literary art and purposeless research. They are face to face with the riddle of the painful earth as it is propounded in the terrible life of London ; but for answer to that they have neat epigrams and clever ridicule of the people who hope or try to solve it. Mr. Lang grows gracefully elegiac on the subject in his opening verses, ' Seekers for a City ', in which he satisfies himself that " Blind are the guides who know the way ", and that their lives " differ not from yours and mine "—improbable as that might seem. To him

"The fierce confederate storm  
Of sorrow, barricadoed evermore  
Within the walls of cities,"

is a theme grown tedious by reason of the very earnestness of those who are impressed by it ; *his* sighs are for Gordon, when they are not for himself ; *his* enthusiasm is for those bellicose colonists that so heroically offered to help the mother Empire against the naked Soudanese, who had, to begin with, wronged neither Englishman nor Australian. In other matters Mr. Lang is a humorist ; but where his sentimentalism comes

into play he goes over to the majority, and can no longer see the ludicrous side of English and Australian heroics over the Egyptian campaign, any more than the base and brutal side. So his bric-à-brac lyre, tuned to the simple ethic of Eton and of Harrow, conscientiously swells the patriotic roar of the music-hall. Whether the Australians acted either like brave or like honest men in offering to help a great Power in an act of tyrannous oppression it no more occurs to Mr. Lang to inquire than to question whether the heroic Gordon, selling his sword for the last time to put down men struggling for racial freedom, is the fittest figure for adoration that modern history can offer. One day, perhaps, the sentimentalism which has bewept and besung him, common as it is to the pot-house, the bric-à-brac shop, the music-hall, and the Alderman's dinner-table, will be recognised as one of the most tawdry of degenerate cults ; an ideal for triflers who, finding the real woe of life too gross and unmanageable, fasten on a theme duly tractable to falsetto and the pathetic-picturesque.

A posing and lavendered philosophy of this kind is not likely to yield strong poetry ; and to do Mr. Lang justice it should be said that he does not pretend it does. His ' Grass of Parnassus ' is professedly the plant that grows in the bog at the foot of the hill—a designation which is, of course, as much too mock-modest as a title pointing to the summit would be too pretentious. Mr.

Lang has long ere now approved himself a scholarly and skilful versifier, and if he makes no progress in depth or compass he still yields us interesting and pleasing work. That, indeed, is too faint praise to give to such verse as this :

## CLEVEDON CHURCH.

IN MEMORIAM, H. B.

Westward, I watch the low green hills of Wales,  
The low sky silver-grey;  
The turbid Channel, with the wandering sails,  
Moans through the winter day,  
There is no color but one ashen light  
On tower and lonely tree;  
The little church upon the windy height  
Is grey as sky or sea.  
But there hath he, that woke the sleeper's love,  
Slept through these fifty years;  
There is the grave that has been wept above  
With more than mortal tears.  
And far below I hear the Channel sweep,  
And all his waves complain,  
As Hallam's dirge through all the years must keep  
Its monotone of pain.

\* \* \* \*

Grey sky, brown waters; as a bird that flies,  
My heart flits forth from these  
Back to the winter rose of northern skies,  
Back to the northern seas.  
And lo, the long waves of the ocean beat  
Below the minster grey,  
Caverns and chapels worn of saintly feet,  
And knees of them that pray.  
And I remember me how twain were one  
Beside that ocean dim;  
I count the years passed over since the sun  
That lights me looked on him;  
And dreaming of the voice that, save in sleep,  
Shall greet me not again,  
Far, far below I hear the Channel sweep,  
And all his waves complain.

This is a genuine music enough, masterly in

cadence, sincere in note, only subtly touched with the sentimentality which haunts Mr. Lang's serious work, and almost wholly free from his foible of æsthetic archaism ; a vice which, snaring as it does so many poets by offering a too easy safeguard against the prosaic, will ere another generation is over have worked the ruin of whole libraries of recent verse. Mr. Lang always succumbs to it when he sentimentalises ; spurious sentiment being unable to stand the strain of the intonation of natural speech. His ' Seekers for a City ' will thus, in a few years, tend to sound thin " like voices in a dream ", and to be numbered with the alien echoes of factitious music that " far, far away do seem to mourn and rave " in the long vista of ineffectual poetry. It has its charm for the moment, this falsetto work ; there is a facile charm even in the sentimental sonnet to Mr. Rider Haggard, in which Mr. Lang seeks to bring poetry to the support of his scandalous weakness for that author's ' She ' ; in ' The Shade of Helen ', in which, not content with musically denaturalising antiquity in ' Helen of Troy ', he tries yet another artificial key ; and in ' A Lady of High Degree ', where the æsthetic mediæval is managed with much lightness of hand. Mr. Lang's best work in this kind—such as the ' Ballade of his Choice of a Sepulchre ', which is not to be found in the present volume—may indeed live as the best of Mr. Burne Jones may live, for its careful faithfulness to its purpose ; and where



he happily turns the archaic to a humorous or a modern end, as in 'The Master's Yonder in the Isle',—a ballade as good as Banville's original, 'Le Père est là-bas dans l'Ile', of which it is so happy an English application—his success is probably secure. The wit that here flashes out in 'The Last Chance' is not so common that we can afford to turn our backs on it on account of the poet's less precious qualities :

## THE LAST CHANCE.

Within the streams, Pausanias saith  
That down Cocytus' valley flow,  
Girdling the grey domain of Death,  
The spectral fishes come and go ;  
The ghosts of trout flit to and fro.  
Persephone, fulfil my wish,  
And grant that in the shades below  
My ghost may land the ghosts of fish.

On the whole, however, the present volume is more interesting than important. Some of the early work, as its author smilingly confesses, needs the excuse of having been written during college lectures ; and a good deal of the later, as we have seen, is of an infirm genus. The more ambitious work too often lacks the directness of the lighter. The verses on 'Melville and Coghill', in the first section, are simply weak ; the careful ode 'To Rhodoclea on her melancholy singing' is incurably archaic ; the vaguely musical 'Hesperothen' pieces are, in Wordsworth's phrase, "not inevitable enough" ; 'Good Bye,' though well phrased and turned, is one of too many recent love laments of its kind ; and even

the sonnet, 'Herodotus in Egypt', with its so congenial theme, is rather well-intentioned than felicitous. But let us not, in cataloguing failures, forget to quote such a winning success as this, in which there is hardly a flaw save the odd tautology in the fourth line and the modish note of "wan" in the next :

TWILIGHT ON TWEED.

Three crests against the saffron sky  
 Beyond the purple plain;  
 The kind remembered melody  
 Of Tweed once more again.

Wan water from the Border hills,  
 Dear voice from the old years,  
 Thy distant music lulls and stills,  
 And moves to quiet tears.

Like a loved ghost thy fabled flood  
 Fleets through the dusky land;  
 Where Scott, come home to die, has stood,  
 My feet returning stand.

A mist of memory broods and floats,  
 The Border waters flow;  
 The air is full of ballad notes,  
 Borne out of long ago.

Old songs that sung themselves to me,  
 Sweet through a boy's day-dream,  
 While trout below the blossom'd tree  
 Plashed in the golden stream.

. . . . .

Twilight, and Tweed, and Eildon Hill,  
 Fair and too fair you be;  
 You tell me that the voice is still  
 That should have welcomed me.

This is dated eighteen years ago ; and it may be doubted whether the author's serious verse has often yielded as true a note since. Political senti-

mentalism and half-earnest anthropology are not the best guides to Parnassus' peak.

II.— 'ESSAYS IN LITTLE.'  
(1891.)

Those persons are surely hasty who lament that the spirit of science is swallowing up alike art and literature in these days ; at least they are surely hasty as regards English literature. A whiff of Ibsen or Zola from over-seas alarms them unduly. Who, for instance, that reads Mr. Lang's 'Essays in Little' can feel that there is any risk of our literary criticism being reduced to the semblance of science in this generation? And who, it may be asked in rejoinder, will wish that it should be so, when he has enjoyed Mr. Lang's dozen or more of lightly-turned essaylets, all so readable and so bright—and compares them with the laborious and labor-giving performances of the analysts and the "comparative" school. Certainly Mr. Lang has a great advantage over these schools, with his light hand, his wit, and his unflagging facility. His books are legion, and they scarcely contain a dull page—if we put aside 'Myth, Ritual, and Religion' (where the courage to be scientifically dull, perhaps, might sometimes have succeeded better than the determination to be entertaining), and the 'Life of Sir Stafford Northcote'. The last was indeed an awful undertaking for a man like Mr. Lang. There are some of us who would subscribe to almost any newspaper on the chance of reading

Mr. Lang's articles now and then ; but it must be a rare hardihood of hard reading that makes any but a reviewer or a Tory grapple with a life of the late Lord Iddesleigh. In this case Mr. Lang has in a manner given himself away. But the ' *Essays in Little* ' are light enough to counteract any sinking effect which that other performance may have on Mr. Lang's reputation.

And yet the spirit of discontent, which in politics—other people's politics—Mr. Lang detests so heartily, prompts some ungrateful discussion as to whether Mr. Lang does well so boldly to defy the laws of gravity as he does in his critical essays; whether there is not such a thing as writing too easily, and being too universally entertaining. He has told us pleasingly ' *How to fail in literature* ' ; but perhaps he has overlooked one way—that of succeeding in book-making. How, for instance, will these and others of his ' *Essays in Little* ' rank a generation hence? I do not speak of the price of the large-paper copies, which I am told will never go down, but of the currency of the criticism. Mr. Lang's school—he belongs to a school, though he will doubtless deny it—have made a happy effect in current literature by developing simplicity of judicial method where other schools cultivate complexity. Thus Mr. Lang is quoted by Mr. Henley as having avowed himself prepared to welcome " *free education* ", since " *every Englishman who can read, unless he be an Ass, is a reader the*

more " for Dickens. I do not find that passage in Mr. Lang's essay-in-little on Dickens, as reprinted in this volume. And I am led to wonder whether he can have deleted it—as he appears to have done other passages—in view of the criticism of Mr. Henley on Thackeray. Mr. Lang loves his Thackeray, and makes a very good answer to the fallacious people who think to belittle 'Vanity Fair' by insisting on the insipidity of Amelia. But Mr. Henley settles matters about Thackeray just as Mr. Lang did in regard to Dickens; and lumping together Laura and Ethel and Amelia, he informs us that he "can but think him stupid who could ever have believed them interesting or admirable or attractive or true". It thus seems possible that Mr. Lang, called stupid by his co-critic for his taste in Thackeray, may have wished to recall the opinion, genially as it was meant, that he who cannot enjoy Dickens is an ass.

It is perhaps not quite fair to Mr. Lang to call him of the same school as Mr. Henley. Rather we might say that they belong to different schools in the same critical camp. Over Mr. Henley's I am in doubt as to whether it should be called the whiskey-and-water school or the school of whiskey without water. And, as we see, he and Mr. Lang sometimes differ widely. But while these critical authorities flout certain of each other's opinions, their way of dealing with opposition and enforcing antipathy is essentially

the same. It is the method of vivacious bluster, sometimes witty and often genial, as in Mr. Lang's work ; often eloquent, as in Mr. Henley's. Technically speaking, it is the theological method. You like Dickens, say, because you have enjoyed his fun " from a boy " ; and since you have enjoyed him so much you will not hear him run down for his faults ; though you may genially admit that he has some ; while towards those who find the faults insufferable you are humorously abusive. That is the witty and genial way. But when, like Mr. Henley, you chance to hate Thackeray because in his raw youth he was rudely insolent to Berlioz or somebody else whom you admire, you go about to vituperate as nearly as possible everything that Thackeray did, though granting his mastery of style ; and by way of epigrammatic climax you decide that he " was the average clubman *plus* genius and a style ". Thackeray in his boyhood said nothing sillier of Berlioz or anybody else ; but you have at least had your critical fling.

Well, with some, this sort of thing palls. When Mr. Lang and Mr. Henley have delivered themselves of their convictions, and your literary entertainment is over, you are led to ask whether this brisk fire of asseveration and contradiction is worth keeping up by way of business in life. That Mr. Lang enjoys Dickens and Dumas, and that Mr. Henley dislikes Thackeray, are biographical facts of a certain amount of interest, which

may even last for generations. But when you come to think for yourself about Thackeray and Dickens and Dumas, there is a chance that you may want to understand why you and other people hold the critical opinions you do ; and if you go so far as to want to make generalisations which will consistently justify one set of opinions and account for others, you will find it profitable to put these brilliant writers on the shelf, or take them down only to select examples of self-contradiction, inconsistency, and mutual slaughter.

Who, for instance, illustrates better than Mr. Lang the illusion of prejudice? He takes up, say, his Dickens or his Scott, both of whom he read before his bias was fully formed ; and he playfully storms at those who " cannot read Dickens ", though he is, as is remarked by that thorough-going worshipper, Mr. Henley, " half the ideal of his own denunciation ". The monstrous artistic faults of Dickens he just brushes aside. So with Scott's poetry. The charges against that, he points out, " are, on the whole, little more than the old critical fallacy of blaming a thing for not being something else " : as for him, he enjoys it in its way. Now, the beauty of the case is that the critical fallacy in question is half of Mr. Lang's critical stock in trade. His praise is a brisk expression of the exhilarated or sentimental feelings set up in him by his favorite authors—Scott, Dumas, Homer, and so on ; and he is at his best where he vividly elaborates the statement of these

feelings, as in his delightful paper on 'Homer and the Study of Greek'. But let him take up a writer who never chanced to capture him in youth, or who comes to him as an alien temperament, repellent to his mature idiosyncrasies, and Mr. Lang's whole critical method reduces itself to the fallacy of blaming the thing because it is not something else. To give a tangible reason why this should be set above that, is beyond him.

I have read a paper by Mr. Lang on Ibsen, in which, save for a preposterously patronising quotation from Dumas at the close, there was not a sentence save of fault-finding of the most elementary sort. Just as some women blame Thackeray because they hate Becky Sharp, so did Mr. Lang gird at Ibsen because Ibsen's people were so antipathetic to him. In his paper 'To a Young Journalist' he confesses this failing. "There are, I admit, authors so antipathetic to me, that I cannot trust myself to review them. Would that I had never reviewed them!" But that is only a penitential spasm of superior virtue, roused by a sense of other people's failings; and Mr. Lang will assuredly sin again when the temptation comes. His many opportunities for anonymous writing suit too well with his many prejudices not to be embraced by them. Either way he is in a sad predicament. He must either confine himself to sectarian panegyric or bewray his weakness by sectarian exclusiveness.

Take, in this very volume, his vindication of his



beloved Dumas. "I read," he says, "the stilted criticisms, the pedantic carplings of some modern men who cannot write their own language, and I gather that Dumas is out of date. There is a new philosophy of doubts and delicacies, of dallyings and refinements, of half-hearted lookers-on, desiring and fearing some new order of the world. Dumas does not dally nor doubt: he takes his side, he rushes into the smoke, he strikes his foe; but there is never an unkind word on his lip, nor a grudging thought in his heart. It may be that Dumas is not a master of words and phrases, that he is not a *raffiné* of expression, nor a jeweller of style. When I read the maunderings, the stilted and staggering sentences, the hesitating phrases, the far-sought and dear-bought and worthless word juggles, the sham-scientific verbiage, the native pedantries of many modern so-called 'stylists', I rejoice that Dumas was not one of these." Now, this tirade, in which Mr. Lang's own style trembles with ill-temper, is meant either for certain critics or for certain novelists. I do not know who are the critics who take pains to show that Dumas is out of date. I do not remember to have seen any recent allusions to him save those of Mr. Lang and Mr. Henley, and the gentlemen of that party, who sing "He's a jolly good fellow" once a week with appropriate harmony. Some critics, perhaps, state the obvious fact of Dumas's psychological superficiality and primitiveness without acknowledging as they

ought his immense fertility and executive energy, and his wonderful vigor of imagination in his own sphere. But to what extent does Mr. Lang answer them, if it is such critics that he is abusing? And if he is thinking of certain novelists, such as George Eliot or George Meredith or Mr. Howells—again, what does his outburst amount to? What of rational—not to say scientific—comparison or elucidation is there in such a splutter of spleen? It is the dialectic method of the thin-skinned schoolgirl who, confronted by a sharp difference of opinion, routs her antagonist with the formula, “ You’re a nasty ugly thing ”.

It is true that certain critics and novelists fall into vices of pedantry and obscurity in the effort to do things that Dumas and Mr. Lang never attempt. George Eliot was at times pedantic—sham-scientific, according to Mr. Lang and others, whose knowledge of the real-scientific is dubious ; and Mr. Meredith’s style-sense is now as obviously and hopelessly diseased as the color-sense of Mr. Holman Hunt. So it is, in different degrees, with some critics. But a criticism worthy of the name would see and say how these failings came about, and to what gifts they were complementary. Dumas certainly wrote simply. He had nothing difficult to say ; his weakness was triviality and intellectual emptiness. Mr. Lang is a wit, and so says things that nobody else could say ; but in the way of criticism and reasoning his style is generally simple (it is not always so) because his

reflections are simple and even shallow; and *his* defects in turn are nullity and sentimentalism. Something is to be forgiven to the writer who is cumbersome and unlucky in setting forth a difficult analysis or generalisation; and something is to be deducted from the writer who seeks to excel only in the easy, whether it be anecdotal mythology or effusive writing-table-talk.

It would be no difficult matter, wit apart, to sound the praise of any popular writer whatever as plausibly as Mr. Lang does that of his favorites. Let us take 'Ouida', whom he cannot stand, and strike his genial key-note: "It is not to be denied that her culture is fatally lady-like, and that her airs of erudition have added to the gaiety of reviews. Her archæology is somewhat as the morbid psychology of Dickens, a department of Hypothetics, an *à priori* Madame Tussaud's. But who cares for the bogus Latin and the quack mediævalism in following the fortunes of those noble guardsmen, those splendid pugilists and swordsmen, who thrash plebeians with one hand and stop runaway carriages with the other? Who does not turn with a glow of satisfaction from one of Mr. James's desolate epics of no-action to the swing and dash of 'Ouida's' romances, where the lovers drive a coach-and-six through any commandment at a venture, and live their lives in a revel of love and gladness and wine? Dear lady! Into how many dull lives has she not brought the burning hues and heats of the south;

for how many falterers in the mist has she not conjured up the vision of the purple seas! Never, while men are men and women are women, will her gorgeous panorama be out of date, or the rich strains of her barrel-organ fail to thrill the generous heart!" Why, it is almost an Essay in Little, wanting only the wit.

If I dared to risk being analytic while Mr. Lang is under review, I could find much to say of the subtle consistency of his literary criticism with his attitude towards religion. One of the debile host who fear to doubt, yet cannot believe, he takes pot-shots at rationalism, handles Hebrew mythology with an anxious concern for Sunday susceptibilities and "the beautiful Church of England", and interlards his desultory myth-lore with falsetto phrases of pietism, which make the student raise his eyebrows, and bring tears to the eyes of the Sunday-school teacher. Is not this just the writer and scholar to turn the task of literary criticism into a manufacture of lollipops for good boys and black doses for bad? Is not sentimentalism in literature just the analogue of sham pietism in philosophy? But there—perhaps I am already hovering on the brink of the "old critical fallacy" of blaming the wit for not being something more. And that is not a fitting attitude towards the brightest of living journalists, on the part of the most obscure.

## MR. EDWARD CARPENTER.

(1892.)

THE death of Walt Whitman has followed close on the issue of a new and enlarged edition of the poetical works of the one writer who has seriously and successfully written in his manner.\* Noteworthy in any case, this third edition of 'Towards Democracy' now moves the critical reader to think out once for all the artistic question which is so often raised over the work of Whitman, and which equally needs to be raised by that of Mr. Carpenter. The death of the old poet has evoked in abundance the old hostile criticisms, significantly softened, in most cases, by the acknowledgment of his moral originality and worth, but no less explicit than of old as to his literary method. Indeed, among a hundred friendly or enthusiastic salutes to the memory of the man, there is hardly one claim for his "poetry" as a permanent artistic product. If this be so as regards the hardy originator of the "formless" style, what is likely to be the verdict on the cultured Englishman who, with an academic training at his back, deliberately elected to endorse Whitman's method in Whitman's manner?

To the disciple, as to the master, only the prejudiced or the pedantic will deny credit for original powers of perception, sympathy, moral insight,

\* 'Towards Democracy.' By Edward Carpenter. Third edition, enlarged. London: T. Fisher Unwin.

and initiative, and a large share of that impassioned cast of thought which is the raw material of poetry in all ages. Anyone who is in the least prepared to sympathise with the aims of either, and who can overcome his nervous aversion to the wilful audacity of the method of composition, must be impressed by the freshness and the fervor, the penetrating truth, the momentum, of a hundred passages of 'Towards Democracy', as of 'Leaves of Grass'. There are qualities of observation and feeling in Mr. Carpenter's work so striking and so genuine that not even the peculiar deliberate-ness of his imitation of another man's form can keep out of sight his originality of gift. He is as original in feeling as his model. But why then did he elect to follow that model?

Only Mr. Carpenter can give the whole answer; and yet perhaps his answer would not be the whole. Would he admit, to come to the main point, that he has chosen this way of expressing himself, not because it was the easiest way for the reader to receive his meaning, but simply because it is the easiest way for him to deliver it? Perhaps he would. In that case the critic has only to point out the consequences, awarding to the author neither praise for foregoing, in his desire for social good, the crown that other poets strive for, nor blame for having chosen the way of least toil. Any way, that seems to be the summing-up of the matter. Taking up this new edition and reading it with a matured judgment, tasting the

wine afresh in a spirit of pure appreciation, one begins to ask oneself immediately, Why this fashion of utterance ; and what is its relation to fine literature in general? How does it relate to verse, and how to prose? It is an old reproach to Whitman that his writing was neither verse nor prose, and that it had the merits of neither. But that is not the critical way of putting the point. The artistic defect of Mr. Carpenter's work—to say nothing here of Whitman's—is that it represents the *evasion of the labor* that goes to making good verse and good prose.

What that labor is, the amateur knows pretty well, but the literary craftsman knows best. It is a perpetual discipline. Even the mere business-like statement of a meaning in the right words and in good syntax is a process of construction and adaptation as wearing to the brain as most handicrafts. Mere talk, if it be fluent and coherent, exhausts ; and to converse progressively and interestingly is to work the brain and nervous system hard. But when we come to either the finished and selective expression of a connected train of reasoning, or the giving to ideas the color and fragrance that go with rightly chosen terms and cadences, there is a strain on memory and imagination and feeling, a stress of energy, that is exceeded in the practice of none of what we call the creative arts.

It matters little, as regards the amount of effort, whether what is written be good verse or

good prose. The best of each alike is the fruit of fortunate moments, when heart and brain and nerves are rarely in tune ; but the normal production of either, when the aim is to win hearing and remembrance by style as well as purport, is an art longer than life. A man may write daily for twenty years, and come to it still with a new sense of infinite possibilities of choice, wondering anew over the "mystery" of his craft, as the old craftsmen named it. To string together so many phrases is a small matter, like walking and riding and rowing. To make the string a thing that will live, is as much of a feat as to win a race. And the writer who has in him in any measure the passion for excellence knows that there is no limit to the bestowal of pains on his work, or to the reward that the effort will bring, though not twice in a hundred days may he feel he has done well. A prosist may be pardoned for doubting whether verse, with its more rigorous restrictions, and its higher demand for inspiration, allows more room for various art than prose.

To apply all this to its purpose, let the reader ask himself whether, given literary faculty and the impulse and matter for utterance, it is more easy or less easy to write in Mr. Carpenter's way than in Tennyson's way or Ruskin's way. Let us take, quite impartially, the very first stanza, if so we may call it, of 'Towards Democracy':

"Freedom at last!

Long sought, long prayed for—ages and ages long:

'The burden to which I continually return, seated here



thick-booted and obvious yet dead and buried and passed into heaven, unsearchable;  
[How know you indeed but what I have passed into you?] And joy, beginning but without ending—the journey of journeys—Thought laid quietly aside:  
These things I, writing, translate for you—I wipe a mirror and place it in your hands.”

This is of course not Mr. Carpenter at his best. The facile mysticism, the futile obscurity, are not the qualities that have carried his work into a third edition in ten years. He has made his mark by what is real in him, not by what is unreal. There are doubtless readers who like to brood and boggle over oracles such as the foregoing, and who cultivate an uneasy sense of superiority to those who shrug their shoulders at such matters. But what has won Mr. Carpenter a general hearing is the arresting and disturbing force of his plain words on life and action as they visibly are. What hearty and sane people value him for are such writings, for instance, as his ‘After Civilisation’, which begins thus:

“In the first soft winds of spring, while snow yet lay on the ground—  
Forth from the city into the great woods wandering,  
Into the great silent white woods where they waited in their beauty and their majesty  
For man their companion to come:  
There, in vision, out of the wreck of cities and civilisations,  
I saw a new life arise.  
Slowly out of the ruins of the past, like a young fern proud uncurling out of its own brown litter—  
Out of the decay of a decaying society, out of the confused mass of broken-down creeds, customs, ideals,  
Out of distrust and unbelief and dishonesty, and fear,

meanest of all (the stronger in the panic trampling the weaker underfoot):  
 Out of miserable rows of brick tenements with their cheap-jack interiors, their glances of suspicion, and doors locked against each other;  
 Out of the polite residences of congested idleness; out of the aimless life of wealth;  
 Out of the dirty workshops of evil work, evilly done;  
 Out of the wares which are no wares poured upon the markets, and in the shop windows,  
 The fraudulent food, clothing, drink, literature;  
 Out of the cant of Commerce—buying cheap and selling dear—the crocodile sympathy of nation with nation—  
 The smug merchant posing as a benefactor of his kind, the parasite parsons and scientists;  
 The cant of sex, the impure hush clouding the deepest instincts of boy and girl, woman and man;  
 The despair and unbelief possessing all society—rich and poor, educated and ignorant, the money-lender, the wage-slave, the artist and the washerwoman alike;  
 All feeling the terrible pressure and tension of the modern problem;  
 Out of the litter and muck of a decaying world,  
 Lo! even so  
 I saw a new life arise.”

Here there is no mock-philosophy, but forthright significant speech; and the first lines are a breath of the spirit of poetry, which is caught up again in the stanza that comes next. But here, as in the stanza before quoted, though in a less degree, we have broken rhythms, broken accidence, jerky progress; collocations without vital connection, as of lengths of tape-worm; cataloguing without category. These are the notes for a paragraph; not the writing of it out. Is the trouble not at bottom indolence? Let it be granted that the whole purport was well worth uttering, and that it would be an artistic mistake to try to put it

into verse. But why, unless for fear of labor, was it not put into sentenced prose?

To some readers, possibly, it may be more impressive as it is ; but are they either the average readers or the best readers? Is it not an untrained rather than a trained taste that is caught by the oracular air and the prophetic abruptness? Why should Mr. Carpenter address us like a fakeer instead of like a cultured Englishman as he is? This chopping up of ragged lumps of language by way of separate paragraphs, what is the aim of it? Does he, while thrusting aside verse, really suppose that prose is no fit vehicle for rapturous feeling? Why, Whitman himself argued late in life that the poetry of the future would rise above verse and soar into the freer and "diviner heaven of prose"; though he had in his own practice used prose for his less impassioned strains of thought only. And just as both writers often use their quasi-verse for unimpassioned statement, so might they use genuine welded prose for the impassioned if they cared to be at the labor of making a prose that should be artistically worthy of their message. There are half a dozen sections of Mr. Carpenter's book—such as the picture of England (pp. 52-58); the sketch in York Minster (p. 112); the study 'On an Atlantic Steamship' (p. 203); the Whitmanesque set of views in 'After Long Ages' (pp. 241, 246, etc.); and the piece 'From Turin to Paris' (p. 315)—which if worthily written

might make chapters better than anything similar in Ruskin or Carlyle, being done with a more serene and catholic observation than theirs, and as artistically valuable, almost, as a good essay of Lamb. No less might his more strictly poetic passages have been turned into a noble and lasting prose. For Mr. Carpenter has the seeing eye, and a really great natural gift of expression, only he has allowed or rather forced the gift to go wild, undisciplined, unpruned. He has everything but the charm of finished form.

Perhaps he deliberately chose the Whitmanic formlessness by way of completing his protest against "civilisation". If so, he will find his mistake one day. It is only civilisation that endures. Coleridge, in one of his pregnant fragments, has dwelt luminously on the effect that would be made on primitive men accustomed to the rhapsodic and convulsive movement of barbaric poetry, the earliest form of composed literature, when there first fell on their ears the evolving roll of continuous prose. As Horne Tooke said, speech rose on the downfall of the interjection. Mr. Carpenter seeks to reverse the process. Mr. Saintsbury (*videt meliora probatque*) has unexpectedly remarked that the first secret of style is the use of the full stop. Mr. Carpenter rejects that key. He has chosen to go back to the primitive fashion ; and (barring some section or two in rhyme) he has done so even more persistently than Whitman ; for Whitman clearly felt the value

of syllabic rhythm, and some of his finest effects are made in virtue of it. I can find nothing in Mr. Carpenter that will compare with the *andante* movement and music of 'After an Interval' and 'Reconciliation'. He has chosen to be more Whitmanesque than Whitman in the mass, though he mostly avoids Whitman's audacities of slang and vernacular; and he justifies a verdict of carelessness not merely by his broken utterance generally but by leaving uncured in a third edition such blunders as "kill me to death" (p. 25). For all which, posterity will bring him into judgment. Three editions in ten years is a good deal; but the raw matter of Mr. Carpenter's book, wrought out in a higher and sounder form, would have brought him a greater repute and influence than that. He is better worth hearing as a teacher than Carlyle; as well worth hearing as Emerson; he compares, for sociological perception, with Ruskin at his best, and he never falls into Ruskin's insanities. His worst crudities are just democratic extravagances on the lines of Whitman's. And yet, Carlyle and Emerson, not to say Ruskin, have an enduring advantage over him in respect of their medium, with all their respective faults of inflation and discontinuity; and even Whitman has the advantage too, in respect of his rare flights of golden melody. The best things in Whitman one cons to oneself like fine passages of music; one turns to them as to the pictures or pages where the "rose of beauty burns"; but the

best things in Mr. Carpenter one reads and approves and sets aside. They want the right magic.

And still there is no book of recent years better worth reading once, or even twice or thrice. Mr. Carpenter has not merely echoed Whitman ; he has absorbed him and been inspired by him to an original utterance on life. A thousand times he makes us feel the first-hand sincerity of his thought ; he has even in some directions a deeper science of life than Whitman, who made little account of the economic problems bound up with the future of democracy. He is no less courageous, he is hardly less audacious than Whitman in his handling of the great problem of Sex, on which he delivers a message much needing attention in England, as in the States. And, though he declaims a good deal over God and Jesus and such ancient catchwords, he clearly belongs by rights to the company of Freethinkers, in the broad sense of the word, and will give small pleasure to Christianity by some of his expressions, which, sooth to say, run the risk of being indicted for blasphemy.

When all is said, Mr. Carpenter may find defenders who will protest that his book does not pretend to recognise artistic standards, and ought not to be tried by them. He himself would perhaps point to the closing poem, ' The Body and the Book ', in which he declares :

"Once when the house was closed I dwelt here—a  
prisoner ;

But now that is open—all open—I have passed out. . . . Ask not for the prisoner, for he is not here."

He may claim simply to have expressed himself, desiring only to guide and inspire readers, not to delight them. Even in that case, it has to be asked whether he has attained his end as fully as might be. But if on the other hand he stands as a writer by the declaration in his first book (sec. lxiii, p. 100 of this):

"Be not careful about perfections: I declare to you the day shall come when everything shall be perfect to you"—

then he must just be gainsaid. The last word on the critical side of the question is that form is not a mere embellishment of substance: it modifies substance: and in the end the ill-formed is found to be at bottom ill-thought, since perfection of thought or teaching is never reached save in perfection of expression.

## MR. LEWIS MORRIS' POEMS.\*

### I.

(1890.)

GIVEN a cultured and industrious poet, assiduous in experiment, scrupulous in his themes and his ethics, who has given a great many uncritical readers pleasure and moral instruction, but whose experiments are always imitative, whose technique is always lapsing into commonplace, and whose industry is either always falling short of the strenuous toil that yields artistic excellence or is foiled by an inveterate impotence—given such a poet, how shall conscientious criticism deal with him? It is an embarrassing question. Mr. Lewis Morris has just published his collected works in a volume of five hundred double-columned pages, printed and got up exactly like the edition of Tennyson's works in one volume published more than ten years ago by Messrs. Kegan Paul and Co. Mr. Morris began publishing his verse in 1872, and in eighteen years he has put together nearly as much as Tennyson, who began publishing in 1830, did in fifty years. And even if comparison were not obscurely suggested at every page, to readers of the first one-

\* 'The Works of Lewis Morris.' London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, and Co., Ltd.



volume edition of Tennyson, by the typography, it is challenged in the most decisive manner by the many deliberate imitations of Tennyson's metres and methods and subjects, a kind of coincidence which, joined with the exact duplicating of the printing, creates some very odd sensations. Among the six or eight most productive English poets of his time—Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, Swinburne, William Morris, Edwin Arnold, Buchanan—Mr. Lewis Morris holds quite a unique position as a plagiarist of phrase and an imitator of tune. Not to speak of many half-echoes as to which there might be doubt, we have in his first volume of 'Songs of Two Worlds' two elaborate poems, one filling about three pages in the present edition, and one filling about twenty, both of which are systematic imitations of Tennyson. 'The Wanderer,' the longer poem, begins thus :

I reared my virgin Soul on dainty food,  
I fed her with rich fruit and garnered gold  
From gardens planted by the pious care  
Of the wise dead of old.

Save for an extra foot in the second line, this is exactly the metre of 'The Palace of Art', and it is applied to as closely similar a theme as could be found. The first verses of the two poems sound precisely the same key, and the imitation is throughout of the most devoted kind. Then in 'Love and Death' we have this beginning :

Dear heart! what a little time it is since Francis and I  
used to walk

From church in the still June evenings together, busy  
with loving talk ;  
And now he is gone far away over seas, to some strange  
foreign country,—and I  
Shall never rise from my bed any more, till the day  
when I come to die.

Here, with a difference of metre and rhythm, we have essentially the anxiously popular style and method which Tennyson employed first in 'The May Queen', and later in 'The Grandmother'. So, again, in 'The Bitter Harvest', though in another metre, we have the most obvious variation on Tennyson's 'Will'; and in 'Doubt'—still in the first collection—a precise echo of style and theme from Arnold's 'The World and the Quietist', and 'Growing Old'. In the second volume Tennyson is again followed in 'The Apology', and 'The Touchstone', both built on 'The Two Voices'; while in 'Gilbert Beckett and the Fair Saracen' we have an attempt to catch at once the mellow rhythm and the winning manner of 'The Miller's Daughter' and 'The Day Dream'. Nor does Mr. Morris grow less imitative with enlarged experience. His 'Gwen' is as palpably a sustained imitation of 'Maud' as 'The Wanderer' is a planned imitation of 'The Palace of Art'. At least one echoed phrase he has deleted since the first edition; but the plagiarism runs through the entire cast of the work, through a dozen lilts and motives, which positively startle one by their unashamed copying. And in the 'Ode of Life', among a variety

of echoes, we have a determined simulation of Wordsworth :

" Oh, little child ! thou bringest with thee still,  
As Moses, parting from the fiery hill,  
Some dim reflection in thine eyes,  
Some sense of Godhead, some indefinite wonder  
As of one drifted here unwillingly . . . .  
Some glimpse of a more glorious land and sea ! . . . .  
And Life's imperial portals opening gradually wide."

The inspiration of the whole ode is from Wordsworth's masterpiece ; and even the " imperial portals " are adapted from the elder poet's " imperial palace " ; though the couplet which closes Wordsworth's next section, on the infant, might have given pause to most plagiarists :

" As if his whole vocation  
Were endless imitation."

Now, such prevailing unoriginality must in any case detract from a poet's credit, since to copy even pleasingly another man's invention is to do a much less worthy and important thing than the first performer did. But in Mr. Morris's case there is the further drawback that his technique constantly falls immeasurably below that of the masters he imitates. It is ruinous to him to compare the workmanship of ' Gwen ' with that of ' Maud ', or of the ' Ode of Life ' with that of the ' Intimations of Immortality '. Tennyson's thrilling and flawless melodies, his golden continuity of perfect phrase, are suggested only by convulsive repetitions of his cadences and the assumption of his dramatic manner. The organ-like

majesty of Wordsworth's best lines is missed for lack of his spontaneous elevation of thought. True, Mr. Morris has a certain gift of melody, which yields at times very pretty verses. This is musical :

Fair streams, which soon some stress of Life and Time  
Shall bring together,  
Under new magical skies and the strange weather  
Of an enchanted clime.

Perhaps the most fortunate piece of expression and versification in the 'Ode of Life' is the following :

We cannot tell at all, we may not know . . . .  
What strong instinctive thrill  
The mother's being doth fill,  
And raises it from miry common ways,  
Up to such heights of love;  
We cannot tell what blessed forces move,  
And so transform the careless girlish heart  
To bear so high a part.  
We cannot tell; we can but praise.

But for one such success of idea and of art Mr. Morris's work always presents three or four irritating slovenlinesses and failures. In the section on 'Boyhood' in the same Ode we have such machine-made lines as :

The playfield echoes with the joyful noise  
Of troops of agile boys  
Who, bare-armed, throw the rapid bounding ball;  
Who shout and race and fall;

and in the next section we have girlhood apostrophised thus :

And now the singer, lifting a clear voice  
In soaring hymns or *carols that rejoice*,  
Or *busied with thy seam*. . . .

Thy seam ! A great poet, of course, may fall into bathos now and then ; but with Mr. Morris it is a normal exercise, and comes not of momentary aberration, such as made possible the close of ' Enoch Arden ', but of a habitual bias to commonplace. He is quite happy in doing such treadmill work as this :

Toil is the mother of wealth,  
The nurse of health ;  
Toil 'tis that gives the zest  
To well-earned rest.

When his work is minutely scrutinised, he is found sometimes through whole poems to begin stanza after stanza with a tolerable line or two, and then slop it up with anything that will rhyme, exhibiting a constant artistic callousness or failure of perception—two defects equally fatal to the poet. Here is a sample from the early poem ' At Havre de Grace ' :

Before her still the vestal fires  
Burn unextinguished day and night ;  
And the sweet frankincense expires,  
And fair flowers blow, *and gems are bright :*  
*For a great power in Heaven is she,*  
*The star and goddess of the sea.*

One reads on in a kind of fascination, fatally prepared for the decline in each stanza from the motivated and respectable beginning to the miscellaneous padding which it drags behind it ; till either irritation or weariness supervenes. If we escape the former, we can hardly miss the latter. The trouble about Mr. Morris's work in the mass is that, while he always hankers after reflective

or philosophic themes, he has really no originality of thought to atone for mediocrity or absolute poverty of style. His serious thinking is indeed not below the average ; it is very much like that of Tennyson, a decent level of educated musing on life and death and the universe and human nature, attuned in general to a respectful theism, with occasional sham excursions into scepticism for the sake of a little excitement. In Tennyson that sort of thing is generally saved from commonplace even at the worst by the rare felicity of his phrasing and his harmonies ; and Tennyson can at times conquer us by the mere passion of his bitterness or his lamentation. Browning, on the other hand, holds attention in despite of reckless composition by a freshness and eagerness of message which, even if it yield a dubious residuum on analysis, piques curiosity for the time. But it is the misfortune of Mr. Morris to retail a number of Tennysonian and even Tupperian propositions, in his reflective verse, without being able to transfigure them by his style ; so that his commonplace seems aggressive and blatant in comparison with the not really less mediocre moralising which set him rhyming by its music. Yet reflective verse seems to be his natural bent : he is awkward in narrative and drama ; and one does not feel that he would ever have aimed at lyric passion if he had not caught fire once in a way at ' Maud '. ' The Epic of Hades,' finally, does not endure re-reading ; and it is difficult to

explain its popularity on any theory other than the hankering of literature-loving women to have the classic stories in an embroidered form. A similar leaning is doubtless the cause of the success of Sir Edwin Arnold's 'Light of Asia'; but that work has much more distinction and art in its blank verse than Mr. Morris's flavorless pseudo-Tennysonian 'Epic'.

And yet one returns to the question raised above at the outset: what are we to make of Mr. Morris's apparent success in pleasing so many fairly educated people? He tells us of it himself, in characteristically bad verses on the death of a youth who had acted as his copyist:

"'Twas four years ago, and so splendid  
Did my first book of songs appear,  
That, though oft-times already rejected,  
I sent them forth then without fear.

Nor in vain. *For now many minds know them,*  
And many are kindly in praise. . . . "

It would seem that those kindly persons have been appealed to by the poet's teachings or sentiments; and, reluctant to make light of a singer who thus gives pleasure of a not unworthy kind, one turns over again his pages looking for something eminent in beauty or in power, some "jewel five words long" that may sparkle on Time's, or even the century's, forefinger. But it is in vain: there is nothing great, nothing triumphant, nothing memorable, only, at best, tolerable accomplishment, and too often not that. One feels as if the industry which has produced this copious body of

verse in eighteen years might, if it had been concentrated with a high purpose, have yielded something much more durable. Tennyson, it is said, has often spent a day over a quatrain, or even over a line, smelting, refining, welding, filing. But after his eighteen years of production, Mr. Morris seems as little inclined to such labor as at the outset ; indeed some of the verses in his first volume are among the best he has done. Time will show whether work so facile can continue to hold readers.

## II.

(1891.)

It would be idle, at this time of day, to raise any protest against the facile quality of a new volume of verse by Mr. Lewis Morris. The popularity of his books, which has culminated in the issue of a collected edition in one volume, has long shown that he has established himself with a large public ; and those who found pleasure in the ' Epic of Hades ' may very well find it anew in ' A Vision of Saints '. It remains possible and desirable, however, to emphasise the fact that Mr. Morris remains not so much a minor as a third-rate poet, and that the criticism which applies to his verse the kind of praise earned by Tennyson and Arnold is either incompetent or forgetful of perspective. If, as needs must, there is to be a poetry of commonplace technique and cheap in-



spiration, fitted for the young and for the somnolent semi-Sabbatarian, Mr. Lewis Morris may very well be looked to for the supply, he being a moral and grammatical writer, with safe principles and humane sympathies. His verse always scans, and its elementary music may beneficently serve to introduce young beginners to the world of poetic art, and to furnish to undeveloped adult tastes some substitute for the higher sensations they have missed. Just as there are grades in capacity to appreciate music, there are grades in the appreciation of verse. And, after all, the results attained by Mr. Lewis Morris are not more likely to injure or mislead taste than those latterly reached by the far stronger and more original William Morris, in whom energy and versatility are frustrate of their due fruits by reason of an inveterate archaism and spurious simplicity, which finally becomes, by sheer prolixity, more tedious even than platitude. But let criticism at least keep clearly in view the fact that Mr. Lewis Morris's verse is not poetry in the sense in which Tennyson's is, but in comparison a mechanical product, simulating the true as cheap goods imitate dear. The reminder is the more necessary because of Mr. Morris's continued commercial practice of appending to his books a copious anthology of the "notices", journalistic and other, in which his poetry has been praised.

The subject matter of Mr. Morris's latest volume is in every way appropriate to his powers.

In it, he writes, he has carried out "the design which he had long entertained of attempting for the beautiful Christian legends and records that which has so often been done for the mythology of Greece. It has been, as will be seen, his desire, not to confine himself to the saints of any one Church or Creed, but to appeal to the spirit common to them all, which in all ages, and through every form of belief, has animated the whole company of faithful men." If any criticism is to be passed on the plan of the book, it is that it does not rise intellectually, but only formally, to this programme. After a conventional poem we have, as introductory

"To real lives, lived upon earth for Heaven,  
Two gracious legends, like the vanished tales  
Of older Greece,"

namely, the tales of the Seven Sleepers and St. Christopher. After these comes an account of Antoninus Pius, who is not unjustly, but still not quite judicially, set above his successor Marcus Aurelius, as a model Pagan; and from these we pass to SS. Perpetua and Felicitas. Now this latter, like several of the other Catholic saint-stories, is more than probably fictitious, and to group it with the perfectly historical figure of Antoninus Pius, and that in turn with the wholly mythical Seven Sleepers, is to lose real touch with the scheme suggested in the preface. It is a poor compliment to Christianity, surely, to represent it by "saints" who merely figure as legen-

dary martyrs for creed, or who, like Christopher, belong to universal mythology, while Paganism is represented by the noble and genuine figure of an Emperor who steadily lived an admirable and beneficent life, tranquilly transcending immeasurable temptations to evil. Later on, Mr. Morris gives us Francis of Assisi, and Elizabeth of Hungary, who compose slightly better with his plan ; but these again are followed by Bunyan, Elizabeth Fry, Henry Martyn, and Father Damien, and the critical reader who, skipping desperately, gets to the end, feels he has gone a kind of round of peep-shows in which no two pictures are on the same plane or scale, or taken in the same medium or the same light. Bunyan is already remote literary history, and Damien is current newspaper fact ; and even Bunyan again is far more truly a historical figure than Elizabeth of Hungary, of whom it is hardly possible to pretend that we have really trustworthy knowledge. She is distinctly less real to us than Antoninus. Why had not Mr. Morris the courage to attempt Cromwell, whom Arnold, in his salad youth, made the subject of a University prize poem ?

Sooth to say, there is one unifying element in the business, namely, Mr. Morris's mind and art, which might well justify the exclusion of Cromwell. The book really has a kind of homogeneity in respect of the kind of falsetto in which Mr. Morris sings alike the mythical and the historical, as it were to an accordion accompaniment. In

him the poetic faculty is a kind of intellectual diabetes, which turns all nutriment to sugar. Antoninus, the Seven Sleepers, St. Christopher, St. Catherine, Martyn, Damien, all are sentimental studies in conventional pose and elementary color, fitted for the instruction of Sunday schools and such as are of weaker capacity. The thought never rises to the dangerous heights of real catholicity, despite the inclusion of Antoninus, for the earlier saints are mostly such in virtue of anti-Paganism and Christian martyrdom, and in the account of Martyn we have a perfectly orthodox allusion to "The Brahmins' fables, the relentless lie of Islam," as if Brahmins and Mohammedans might not, on Mr. Morris's avowed principles, have their saints in turn.

As for the execution, it is of the old sort, an inexpensive imitation of the cadences of Tennyson, such as might be produced at the rate of a canto a day by a thousand living men, and would be, if they could reckon on selling it as Mr. Morris contrives to do. With all his comparative fertility, Mr. Morris must indeed be an indolent writer if he has "long entertained" the plan of this volume without achieving it. There is less literary cerebation in any ten pages of it than goes to the making of a fairly good newspaper article. One journalist has actually reviewed it in serio-comic blank verse, which had quite as much technique in it as the general run of Mr. Morris's, and a great deal more mind. In page after page

and section after section of these 'Visions' we have the same flaccid facility of tune, phrase, and epithet.

"But the saint's body  
Some faithful Christians stealing from the jail,  
Bore to Byzantium: there with pious care  
They buried it, and costly obsequies."

"Now, one fair summer eve, as Phocas sate  
At supper, came a knock, and he in haste  
Opening, three strangers waited at the door,  
Whom he bade enter, and take food and rest."

"Now, when the boy had come to youthful years (!)  
Being his father's son (!!), rich in all store  
Of gay attire (!!!), and filled with pride of life  
And luxury, yet would his generous heart  
Stand at the gate of pity."

And so on. Imitative to the last, Mr. Morris copies Tennyson's lapses as he does his cadences; and the "costly obsequies" here echoes the vulgarity of the "costly funeral" in 'Enoch Arden'. But of the intense travail that in Tennyson fuses thought and word into beryl and diamond of perfect phrase, this complacent practitioner knows as little as he does of the exaltations in which poetic perception leaves far behind the stereotyped thinking of the respectable reader. One good effect of his performance, accordingly, must be to move the more intelligent of his younger readers to ask themselves why poetry should be written at all; why stories should ever be told in sing-song verse, puffed out with saccharine epithets, and sluggish with artificial accidence and mere space-filling phrase. Such readers must soon begin to suspect

that inferior poetry is not worth the time spent in reading it ; and this perception always makes for sanity and culture. But all this, of course, is going somewhat in the face of our preliminary admission that there must be inferior poetry for untrained tastes. It is useless, after that admission, to say "Woe to them by whom it comes ". Rather let us admit that Mr. Morris worthily fills the shoes of Montgomery and Tupper, and possess our souls in patience.

## MR. HOWELLS' RECENT NOVELS.

(1890.)

SOME two or three years ago Mr. R. L. Stevenson stated, in one of a series of essays written by him in America, that Mr. W. D. Howells had about that time fallen into great unpopularity, or at least much disfavor, in his own country, after having enjoyed much acclamation. This change of note among the multitude Mr. Stevenson characterised with befitting contempt, but he offered no explanation of its occurrence, being himself apparently content with the solution of original sin. Since he made his protest, which would be influential in its way, the course of Mr. Howells' popularity in the States, so far as a foreigner can judge, goes some way to explain the former ups and downs on which Mr. Stevenson commented. After Mr. Stevenson wrote there was a reaction, reaching its height over 'A Hazard of New Fortunes', and there now seems to be another ebb of esteem over 'The Shadow of a Dream'. This is all very discreditable to popular constancy, of course, since the merits and demerits of Mr. Howells were all apparent a good many years ago, and their fresh manifestations ought not visibly to disturb the general judgment. But the fact remains, though men of genius are given to forgetting it, that the reading public is never the

same in *personnel* for two years together, and that the book of this year is read by certain thousands of people, young, middle-aged, and old, who did not read that of last year. Further, there are always factions, and the people who are now denouncing an author may just be seizing what they feel to be their best opportunity, they having formerly protested more or less tacitly against what they felt to be an undue eulogy. Howsoever these things be, it is not difficult to understand how Mr. Howells, in particular, should first climb to popularity, then evoke hostile criticism, then re-establish himself, and yet again be run down.

The merits of Mr. Howells' writing were very quickly apparent in the stories with which his first entrance into literature is commonly associated. If he ever had an apprenticeship it does not appear in the series of books with which the mass of his readers are acquainted. Already in 'Their Wedding Journey' and 'A Chance Acquaintance' were manifest the delicate faculty of style, the felicity of phrase and epigram, the humor, the variable power of portraiture, that mark his latest books, along with the same phases of wandering philosophy and erratic sentimentalism. The Marches of 'Their Wedding Journey' are drawn with no less skill, if less minutely, than the older pair in 'A Hazard of New Fortunes'; and the hazy transcendentalism of the recent 'Shadow of a Dream' was already traceable in the communings of some of the superior people in 'A Modern



Instance ' and ' The Lady of the Aroostook '. This last quality, which is always tending towards Unrealism and even silliness, must early have struck many readers in the States as elsewhere, giving the impression that Mr. Howells, as an artist, lacked solidity of build and base, and forcing disadvantageous comparison between him and the leading men in European fiction, or even between him and Hawthorne. A hint of a similar weakness, to be sure, appears in Thackeray, not to speak of Dickens ; but in Thackeray the artist is so massively preponderant, and the sentimental thinker so avowedly episodic, that the artist's work in the mass is never seriously under suspicion. But the work of Mr. Howells as a whole now gives the impression of a personality not unlike his own Basil March, that of a man of delicate sensibility, wit, humor, observation, and skill of presentment, associated for the worse, intellectually speaking, with " The " American Woman, and reproducing her irresponsible thinking, her indescribable philosophy, her lawless intuitions, her charm, and her sentimentality, even while analysing her and sympathetically laughing at her. And whereas it is impossible to read him without enjoying his wit and his adroitness of workmanship, it is also, for many, impossible not to resent the alliance of such gifts with an unmasculine quality of mental fibre. Hence even the same people might go through the process of delighting in his art and his style, then doubting

his grasp of the essentials of life, weighing him in the balances, and finding him wanting. And such might at times even protest more emphatically than those who from the first viewed Mr. Howells' stories in the light of sweetmeats.

The fortune of a novelist in the long run, of course, depends on the number of his successful characters and the degree of power and truth with which they are drawn. Thus it was that after Mr. Howells had appealed successfully to the average novel-reader (who is a woman) by a number of such things as 'Out of the Question' and 'A Counterfeit Presentment' and 'Dr. Breen's Practice', and to the occasional or more eclectic novel-reader, male and female, by 'A Foregone Conclusion', and in part by 'A Modern Instance', he made a general hit by his 'Rise of Silas Lapham', which contained a larger number of studies from the life and a smaller proportion of inadequate sentiment than anything he had yet done. Silas, his wife, and his two daughters were all visibly from nature, though the plain and captivating daughter was of course idealised in order to account for her good fortune. Indeed, nobody in Mr. Howells' books is quite free from the suspicion of phosphorus, so to speak, even Silas showing gleams of it; but that family group really breathed and lived in the round, not merely in the fourth dimension of the idealist's dream. So good were they, and so racy of the soil, that for all the provinces of the English-read-

ing world they more than compensated for the factitious or gratuitous character of some of the surrounding personages, such as the two Carys. The book, with its simple yet telling plot, coming after such a cheap performance as 'A Woman's Reason', certainly broadened Mr. Howells' reputation. It would seem to have been, then, the distinctly flimsier texture of some of his following books, such as 'Indian Summer', that created the irritation of which Mr. Stevenson took note. That book, with all its cleverness and its epigram (it is there that civilised man is described as "still imperfectly monogamous") vexes one by a quality which can hardly be indicated save by the word "spooney". Spooniness, of course, pervades life; but Mr. Howells in 'Indian Summer' seems to find it sufficient in itself, and not the mere saving infusion of sweet imbecility that it is in the bitter draught of existence. The elderly hero, with his cynicism and his softness, his maturity and his fatuity, gives us with a sudden shock that feeling of the possibility of male deterioration alongside of female influence that so often comes vaguely from the study of advanced civilisation. The reassurance, of course, comes in the perception that he is very imperfectly real and not at all typical, but in some ways very far otherwise, just as are the two women, who are not an average of American womanhood but clever single studies. This level-headed Americans must have felt; and for the rest, the catastrophe by which the ena-

mored ex-journalist is severed from the too initiative young woman and saved to the too obstructive widow, is so merely childish as to move derision.

Americans, indeed, might have been expected to forgive a good deal to the author of 'April Hopes', a book which is in some ways almost a complete success, so thoroughly is its particular motive within the author's scope. Perhaps there never has been a more lucid study of the infection of love between two young people of species which seem, indeed, to abound particularly in America, but are in evidence everywhere. The young man's susceptibility, or "mulierosity", to use Charles Reade's word, and the girl's mutability, predictive of future hysteria, are wonderfully well done by purely objective methods, with some of the Bostonian pallor of coloring perhaps, but with far more of luminous humor than a European colorist would be likely to command. The conclusion, too, with its simple subsumption of dangers ahead, is about the most just that is to be found in Mr. Howells' stories. The main artistic fault of the book, too, might be expected to be easily tolerated by the author's countrymen—its attribution, namely, of an impossible cleverness to the everyday run of American talk. In that novel, no man's or woman's phrase ever goes wide of the bull's-eye: the conversation is positively made up of good things when it does not drop into sentimentalism; and old Cary, who is introduced to

deliver the happy generalisation that after all mankind may be divided into two great classes, of men and women, is tranquilly presented as a superannuated bore, whom American people hardly care to talk to any longer. All this brilliant talk is in its way falsetto, as is the intermittent moral inflation of some of the women, and the note of solemnity in connection with the high-minded American attitude towards courtship and marriage. All the same, be it repeated, the book deserved well of Americans, and should have counted for a good deal against 'Indian Summer'.

It is otherwise, however, with 'The Minister's Charge', which certainly needed to be succeeded by 'A Hazard of New Fortunes' in the author's interests. The motive of the former is extravagant even as compared with the strained motive of 'A Fearful Responsibility'; and only the constant brightness of the writing can keep one in any patience with the preposterousness of half the people. They are all clever—so clever, and such fools! How their hyperæsthesis of conscience, ballasted by no common-sense and blown about by every wind of hysteria, can have been developed in the historic organism of New England, is a problem so hard to solve that the reader ends by refusing to believe he is looking at a group either of average or above-average Americans. The truest people in the book, the two working-girls with one of whom the partially true hero falls in

love, reveal all Mr. Howells' genius for observation ; but most of the other women are painted in thin washes of half-humorous half-gushing sentiment. As for the minister, he is every now and then nauseously professional without our being able to feel sure that he is so to Mr. Howells, though the presentment is at times sardonic enough. As a rule, indeed, there can be no mistake when Mr. Howells hates his characters. Unmistakeably has he taken a brief against Angus Beaton in ' A Hazard of New Fortunes ', as unmistakeably as he foredoomed Bartley Hubbard in ' A Modern Instance '. This unrelieved ill-will towards his villainling goes far to spoil the character as a piece of art. Mr. Howells is too refined to have any dealings with the villains of the elder art, but it may be questioned whether his villainling or cad is any more soundly conceived than the full-blown impossibility of yore. Surely the literary interest of a cad—that is, the tragic, not the comic—lies in the analytic exhibition of what is good in him ; and surely Mr. Howells' Beaton and Hubbards are rather indicted than analysed. The effect on the reader is that Beaton has unintelligibly worsened on his hands, as did Hubbard. But the ' Hazard of New Fortunes ' is saved as a whole, not merely by the measure of unity involved in the author's Socialistic attitude but by the convincing quality of the portraiture of the Dryfoos family. Here, as in ' Silas Lapham ', we have an American self-made million-

aire with his wife and two daughters, and yet every feature in the two groups is distinct and individual. If there is anything to choose, the second group is the more perfectly done of the two. Christine is a success of a quite unusual kind for Mr. Howells ; Mela in her way is just as true, and the parents are even more consummately drawn than the elder Laphams. The son, the good young man who dies, is thinnish in comparison ; but he too is perfectly credible, and his function in the plot is most ably conceived. Then the old German Socialist Lindau is a very telling piece of idealism ; and Fulkerson, the joker, a kind of adaptation of the joker in ' The Minister's Charge ', is always too entertaining to let us be intolerant of his impalpability. So too the Woodburns, father and daughter, if not perfectly true, are very well imagined. The weak part of the story, one feels, consists in the Marches, of whom the boy alone impresses us as honestly drawn. It seems as if this couple lay too much about the centre of Mr. Howells' own private sentimentalism to let him look at them steadily from the outside, so to speak ; and the result is that, after the opening study of the wife, which is more objective than that of the husband ever becomes, they irk us by standing in another perspective than that of the best work in the picture. They being a kind of chorus to the action, we feel how much the book owes to the strain of Socialism in the plot, which gives it a unity it would never

otherwise have had, and in effect raises the whole, in large part, to a pitch of strength above any of Mr. Howells' previous performances. It is only the recurring note of sentimentalism, represented in the Marches and the fortunes of the magazine, and the decomposition that seems to overtake the author's idea at the close, that leave us dissatisfied and finally unconquered. For the manner of dismissal of the Dryfoos family is an affectation on the side of humor, and the manner of dropping the curtain with a tag is an affectation on the side of sentiment, quite in Mr. Howells' weaker style.

Many readers, indeed, seem to have been wholly conquered, the Socialism having perhaps as much to do with their enthusiasm as the art of the novel; and the 'Hazard' has won Mr. Howells some of the highest praise he has yet received. But now comes 'The Shadow of a Dream' to stamp in on our intelligence more firmly than ever the fact that we are being ministered to by a gifted sentimentalist. It may be well, in closing, to say precisely what that word is meant to signify. All of us, of course, are sentimental at some moments, most of us very often; and our sentimentalism just consists in our being hurried away by a superficial emotion without thinking out the matter in hand and correcting our first sensation by an all-round survey. In certain states of the nerves such a survey is almost impossible; and what one feels about 'The Shadow of a Dream' is that it was written in such a state,



since only the saving habit of American humor hinders it from being what Mrs. March (herself even such a phenomenon) calls "a mere sop of sentiment". The ethical insanity of 'The Minister's Charge' here goes beyond all pretence of normal reason; the ostensible monomania of a sick and partially insane man is endorsed and enforced by the conduct of all five of the sane people who make up the action, for even the doctor who communicates to the widow the story of her husband's hallucination is as far away from commonsense as any of the rest. And the catastrophe is mere bad melodrama, forcing us to the conclusion that the author is, for the moment, as fully in harmony with the sky-high sentimentalism of his characters as is the feebly rationalising March with that of his wife. The feeling raised by the book is thus sheer impatience. Mrs. March is a trifle staled by custom, though her "tic" is renewed with considerable vicacity; and March, writing in the first person, and writing below Mr. Howells' level, remains as bodiless as he was in the third, his author being apparently unable to endow him with more than half of the stock-in-trade of an individuality. So we are left feeling that if this be a sample of American spiritual experience the Americans are growing grievously soft in the head through too much absorption in the concerns of the heart. And if the harder-headed American is made to feel like that, he must needs have a grudge against Mr. Howells.

## THE MURDER NOVEL.

(1899.)

UNLESS my recollection of the novels of one or two generations ago be astray, there is one remarkable difference between them and the popular school of English romance at the end of the century. Near as they were to the days of highway robbery, of hanging for sheep-stealing, of duelling, and of domestic and European war, our grandfathers and grandmothers were so far different in their tastes from their descendants that, in their novel-reading, they seem never to have wanted, or at least they very rarely got, bloodshed. It seems to have been held in those days that breaking of bones and letting of blood was really not sport for ladies. And it is the distinction of the last score of years in the century, in the matter of romance, to have changed all that.

It is true that Sir Walter, dealing as he did at times with deeds of arms, had now and then to let somebody be killed ; but it was always done with a certain solemnity, as of a serious man over an unfortunate event : so that the one impression we do *not* preserve of his romances is that of the cheerfulness of the taking of life. One hesitates to think what some of our modern authors would

have done with Sir Walter's opportunities—what assiduous sword-play they would have given us in 'Rob Roy' and the 'Legend of Montrose', and how they would have disdained his device, in 'Ivanhoe', of letting the offending Brian de Bois-Guilbert die of "the violence of his own contending passions". The death of the sham herald in 'Quentin Durward' would have been for them an incident barely worth a sentence, and that sentence, in their hands, would not have been one of homily. To them, Sir Walter's respect for mere human life must seem almost valetudinarian; and the slaughterless narratives of Fielding and Goldsmith, to say nothing of Richardson, must have the insipidity of spoon meat.

When one thinks of it, there must have been *some* murders in the old novels: there were pirates and coroners and villains then, as now; the "bowl and dagger school" was a phrase in use; and the clash of arms does still faintly ring from some half-forgotten romances across the century; but, unless the distance lends propriety to reminiscence, the murders were treated as things to be got away from, and the task of the hero in whose sphere of influence they occurred was to "bring the assassin to justice" rather than to assassinate back. And, for the most part, murder was left to the lower orders of character. In Dickens, Jonas Chuzzlewit murders somebody—like Mr. Lang, I cannot recall whom or why—

with an amount of mental strain that communicates itself to the reader, so that the episode looms in memory as something lurid and frightful ; and, similarly, the crime of Bill Sykes bulks blackly and oppressively across the tale. A murder *was* a murder, so to speak, in Dickens. And in Thackeray, so much less melodramatic, and so fastidious about sensation, we never get a murder at all, save by way of a duel. On that head, the author of 'Vanity Fair' would have stared at some of the later practitioners of his craft, who on their part, it is to be feared, must find him preposterously scrupulous about killing, and extravagantly interested in mere character.

In 'Esmond', for instance, the personality of Lord Castlewood is held up to the light in chapter after chapter, and his death by the sword of Lord Mohun is handled as a veritable tragedy ; and when Harry Esmond, with his *botte de Jésuite*, gets a chance later to avenge his kinsman and remove a rascal, he does but wound him, on the now unheard-of ground that it was not for him, a private citizen, to take a life in vengeance. This, be it observed, in a romance, a tale of adventure. In the society novels, of course, such a question did not even arise. For Thackeray, as for Jane Austen, normal human experience did not include the use of cold steel upon fellow creatures, however objectionable ; and these artists did not take Dickens's satisfaction in parading criminals and crimes.

Looking back, one is inclined to think that it was with Dickens that the taste for blood began to come into English fiction. Mr. Wilkie Collins, to the best of my recollection, made a considerable use of murder in his plots ; and Miss Braddon improved upon him in the matter of thrill. Even George Eliot, who, like Mr. Meredith, belonged to the middle age of plot, gives us whiffs of crime in 'Romola' and 'Middlemarch', and raises a delicate question for the coroner in 'Daniel Deronda'. But these coquettings with police news are the merest child's play compared with the hearty and unabashed spirit of slaughter that animates a whole school of romancers who have arisen since George Eliot's day.

It was the gallant Stevenson who first effectively brought the glamor of *gules* into our artistic romance in these latter days. In order of publication, 'Treasure Island' began the entertainment, with its fascinating Long John Silver, its stockade fighting, and its general flow of blood in the scuppers. In 'Kidnapped', after the early bout of assault and ambuscade on the brig, the author held his hand somewhat, aiming rather at an interest of character ; but in 'The Wreckers' he certainly made up for lost time ; and in 'The Black Arrow', which appeared in book form out of its order in time of writing, the handling of sword and knife is spirited and spirit-stirring. A touch of the same scent gives piquancy to the 'New Arabian Nights' and 'The Dynamiters' ;

but it is in 'The Wreckers' that we have the most enterprising use of the gore motive, and in 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' that the charm of crime is most intensely exploited. The naval massacre in 'The Wreckers', the romantic attraction of which consists in its being treated as a disagreeable necessity for which nobody is seriously to be execrated, almost carries us back to the good old tale of the Nibelungen, wherein "a murder grim and great" gives Homeric breadth to the narrative. Finally, in 'The Beach of Falesà', we have the joy of knifing dramatically presented in the first person by "a man who did".

It is not to be supposed that Stevenson did not reflect artistically and even ethically on his employment of blood as local color. Doubtless he would have ready a vigorous retort on the bourgeois sentimentalism of anybody who suggested that he made very little account of murder as a phase of conduct. Still, he seems to have pulled up after the 'Beach' and 'The Ebb-Tide', and bethought him that after all great fiction has more to do with the analysis of the spirit than with the cutting-up of flesh and blood. 'Weir of Hermiston' is a distinct reversion to the psychological.

If Stevenson flagged, however, the neo-romantic school has not yet lost its taste for the higher homicide. Carnage is its handmaid—if one may so modify Wordsworth. Mr. Kipling

has outgone Stevenson in his wholesale manipulation of the murder-motive. In 'The Drums of the Fore and Aft', in particular, he has given to his large public such a touch of the thrill of slaughter as no previous artist had been able to communicate; and in his 'Jungle Book' he contrives, in the intellectual interests of the young, to raise the life of the lower animals to the epic heights of massacre hitherto reserved for the head of the mammalia.

Thus the rising generation is being kept up to date. There used to be a good deal of cutting-off of heads in the fairy tales of a generation ago, Hans Christian Andersen having no aversion to the lusty key set in 'Jack the Giant-Killer'. When a humanitarian lady, some years ago, protested against such literature—and some other sorts—as demoralising to the young, a certain learned journalist scornfully retorted that children are not morally affected in that fashion; and are thus more sensible than some of the adults who supervise them. And doubtless he was right, so far as the question then went. But the boy whose young idea is taught to shoot by the 'Jungle Book' seems to be in a different case; and the British patriot may hopefully reckon that the generation that is being thus guided will be well nurtured for the duties of empire as regards the handling of inferior races, and will be quite peculiarly prepared for the coming Armageddon that so inspires the imagination of our patriots. And, as the

cares of empire widen for us in Africa, we may take similar comfort in the services of Mr. Rider Haggard, whose picture of the Achillean figure of Umslopogaas, the skull-prodder, has doubtless roused many a youth to high resolves, conducive to the civilising aims of Mr. Rhodes.

After the successes of Stevenson and Kipling and Mr. Haggard, the murder novel was bound to be energetically cultivated ; and in Mr. Anthony Hope it has found a master. That versatile artist, finding no great appetite in the public for such moderately exciting fiction as ' A Man of the People ', seems to have passed at one resolute stride from the delicate drawing-room humor of the ' Dolly Dialogues ' to the ruddy and sanguine romance of ' The Prisoner of Zenda '—from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter, as the slang of last generation had it. Nowhere, perhaps, is the latter pursuit taken up in fiction with such scientific grasp, and such a vigilant eye to opportunities, as in the tale of the wondrous career of Mr. Rudolf Hassendyll in Ruritania. The key-note is struck with promptitude and decision on the first day of the proceedings in the matter of king-making. Mr. Hassendyll and his comrades, it will be remembered, return to the castle to find that one of their subordinates has been killed in the process of securing the king. Thus thriftily has time been husbanded. As they ride away and see a party of horsemen approaching in the darkness, the substitute king, full of his new responsi-



bility of office, feels that something must be done in the way of retribution, and accordingly charges with his henchmen into the group, whose general guilt he broadly divines. With regal impartiality he lays about him with his weapon at large, heedless as to degrees of complicity. To this ideal he does not fail to live up; and the result is a butcher's bill which speaks volumes for the soundness of the nerves of the British reading-public. The reader is never allowed to feel that the story drags. If the captivity of the king seems factitiously prolonged, the deaths of other people keep up the interest without a pause. In one chapter, one does feel for a moment puzzled as to the artist's plan of campaign. The prisoner's friends get within reach of him; the sentinel in the boat on the moat is duly knifed; the king is found to be alone in his cell; the rescuer sees a light between the wall and the end of the funnel; and all that is needed is that he should whisper to the king to get into the funnel and be taken up by the boat at the other end. Yet nothing comes to pass; the rescuers withdraw till another time; and one begins to harbor an ungenerous suspicion that Mr. Hope simply countermanded the action because he found he had not yet made the book long enough. But, on retrospect, one remembers the stabbed sentinel and retracts the charge, acknowledging that the night had not been lived in vain, and that the action is consistently progressive.

The seal of popularity having been set upon 'The Prisoner of Zenda', the industrious artist produced, in 'Phroso', a much better romance, in which the excitement of manslaughter is again secured in connection with contemporary life. An educated English nobleman of our day finds himself in situations where the stabbing and shooting of enemies is "all in the day's work", and nobody, save the parties disposed of, is a penny the worse, in reputation or in conscience. I do not recollect how many human obstacles are cleared off in the stirring pages of 'Phroso'; but there are a full half-dozen to the credit of the right side, apart from the stabbed lady. Mr. Hope had used that lady before, in 'The Prisoner of Zenda', and he seems to have felt that, in view of the sameness of her duties in the two plots, he could not very well employ her again, and so had better diversify her career in the meantime by getting her knifed. Those who have been able to follow the acrobatic career of Rupert of Hentzau can report whether the master's hand keeps its perfect cunning. I have been able only to take cursory note that Mr. Hope, true to his art, has killed the king, applying to him also the *ultima ratio*.

More industrious novel-readers than I can doubtless lengthen indefinitely the list of examples of the art-form under notice. It has many varieties, from the vein of Mr. Rider Haggard to that of Mr. Wells; it even promises to tinge the novel

of character, so called. George Eliot spared us the threatened hanging in 'Adam Bede'; but Mrs. Ward carried hers through to the bitter end in 'Marcella'; and, Mr. Hardy gave us (I think) both murder and execution in 'Tess of the D'Urbervilles'. The psychological novel evidently feels the competition of the sarcological, and is moved to adopt modern methods. As for the short story, it now wears the red badge of carnage in two cases out of three, and one may pick up a magazine in which every tale has its justified homicide. That is the crowning charm of the murder novel—nobody is ever prosecuted. It is taken for granted all round that the American gentleman of a Southern State was unchallengeably right when he framed the maxim that "murder is the most gentlemanly crime that anybody can commit".

It is somewhat remarkable, by the way, that despite the universality of its appeal, the murder novel is still almost wholly in British hands. M. Zola indeed added gore to his other coloring in 'La Terre' and 'La Bête Humaine'; but on his powerful palette the pigment did not particularly stand out; and the practitioners of America are in this matter quite behind the age. Mr. James and Mr. Howells obstinately pursue the presentment of mere character and its reactions. Years ago, Mr. George Moore complained wistfully that in Mr. James's books, while there are traditions that grave misdeeds occurred in a past generation,

and hints that they may happen again, "right bang in front of the reader nothing ever happens". Mr. James has proved incorrigible in his distaste for crime, and Mr. Moore seems even to have been partially converted to his view, for 'Esther Waters' is not eminently eventful in the current sense, and the only blood in it is a medical, not a moral phenomenon; while in 'Evelyn Innes' there is not even that. But there is no saying how things may go: it is all very well to exploit the British conscience once in a way with a novel that shows the punishment of betting; but the range of possibility in that line is restricted in comparison with the scope of the theme of unpunished murder. Mr. Stanley Weyman has written some catching stories, one of them a very pretty romance in its way, but his parsimony in the matter of blood threatens to class him low in the race for popularity. He will probably have to give his swordsmen more practical work if he is to hold his own. Fights in which nobody falls will not satisfy the robust appetite of the age.

It is to be observed, too, that the taste appealed to by the sanguinary school is eminently virtuous. That taste is even capable of recoiling from the unpleasantness in 'Esther Waters', where nobody kills or is killed, but where there is a hospital scene and a *faux pas*—things compared with which a murder is refined and romantic. Mr. Robert Cromie, the author of one of the most original and effective sensational romances of the

day, 'The Crack of Doom,' has vehemently attacked the methods of the school of Zola as being nauseous, evidently feeling that the murder by slow strangulation which strikes the key-note of the plot in his romance is something breezy and wholesome in comparison. As regards sex-matters, he is himself strictly conservative, and nowhere more so than in his brilliant war romance, 'The Next Crusade', where the bulk of the population of Turkey are massacred, in revenge for their atrocities, here carefully chronicled. So scrupulous, indeed, are most practitioners of the novel of blood in the matter of what are commonly called the proprieties, that they must be credited with a truly parental concern for the feelings of that "young person of seventeen" whose needs have been so much discussed in connection with the English novel of character. They may justly claim to have written nothing that will bring a blush to the cheek of youth; and, all things considered, it seems difficult to prove that, on the other hand, they ever plant a pallor there. The suffrages of the circulating libraries must be taken to express the decision of the British public that the murder novel is a strictly sanitary product for family reading. Many people boggle at 'Jude the Obscure' and 'Tess'; and not a few, including the *Times* newspaper, at 'Esther Waters'; but nobody, I think, complains of the death-rate in the romances of Mr. Hope, any more than over those of Stevenson and Mr. Rider Haggard.

These writers never fluster the parlor with problems of sex ; and Mr. Hope, though he did introduce a dark lady in the ' Prisoner ', treated her very austere, albeit she leant to virtue's side, and took care that in ' Phroso ' she was legally, if secretly, married. And even that did not save her. Of such strict regard for propriety the great British public is cordially appreciative. Art with us is felt to be on perfectly safe moral ground when it sympathetically represents breaches of the sixth commandment, provided it only stops there and never raises the question of the seventh. This is the great stay of the Anglo-Saxon spirit, as regards all comparisons between itself and the French. Our healthy taste, and at the same time our delicacy, are proved by the satisfaction we take in tales of abnormal bloodshed, where the corrupt public of Daudet and Zola and Huysmans, indifferent to such pure entertainment, persistently contemplates things that go on among average people. Hence the prevalent decadence of French literature.

To be sure, a difficulty might be raised about the possible effects of the murder novel upon the statistics of crime. If it be true that the penny dreadful, with its highwaymen heroes, propels untutored youth to burglary, it seems arguable that the constant reading of tales of honorable murder, written by gentlemen for gentlemen and ladies, might tend to encourage the practice in real life, where it must often seem so convenient,

and where its propriety must often be perfectly clear, as tried by the generous standards of the sanguinary school, so notoriously scrupulous about morals. But thousands of estimable people will be ready to testify that such apprehensions are "morbid" and "sentimental"; so that we seem entitled to be of good cheer over our literary condition. At the close of the nineteenth century, unemasculated by peace and the Peace Society, unsophisticated by Socialism, untainted by utilitarian ethics and French models, our great reading-public draws a Spartan moral stimulus from the healthy novel of homicide; and the weaker sex, too long a prey to mere psychology and the lore of the affections, has learned to share the masculine interest in the effective use of the knife and pistol, whether in public or in private quarrel. There is even ground to hope that the wholesome and educative sport of bull-baiting may be restored, after a century of eclipse, and that the literary gentleman\* who lately deplored the thoughtless haste with which we have "too much abolished brutality" may die comforted about his country.

\* This turns out to have been the late Mr. Stevens.

## METHODISM IN STYLE.

(1887.)

VISITORS to one of the London picture galleries in recent years have had occasion to notice, in the works of one or two painters, a kind of idiosyncrasy which for constraint, stress, and fixity, is probably not to be paralleled in the history of art. Almost all the members of the Pre-Raphaelite school had from the first exhibited a willed quaintness and archaism of workmanship ; Millais being indeed the only one who has well delivered himself—and that not for the best—from the spirit of eccentricity. Dante Rossetti, who is not specially under view in these comments, he presenting a more complex problem than do his early comrades, may at least be said to remain for students of art a case of individuality so fantastic, so uniform in caprice, as to depend for enduring fame certainly more on his strange personal equation than on the depth of insight or range of power shown by him in either of the arts he wrought in. But while Rossetti reveals the mark of artistic monomania in his morbid passion for one incredible type of face, yet even in his painting there are signs of a certain variety of view ; while in his poetry he really does show a power to change his style and attitude and to mirror more than one phase of life and thought. The typical art methodists, so to say, are, in conception and design, Mr. Burne Jones, and in color, Mr. Holman Hunt—at least one would so describe Mr. Hunt if it



were not for the suspicion in his case of sheer functional aberration. After years of uncritical partisanship among his admirers, and prudent homage on the part of the critics, it is beginning to be said aloud that the latest work of this painter testifies to downright and incurable disease of the color sense, compensated by no burden of thought or grace of fancy. It is seen that were an amateur to paint so, his work would be scouted on all hands as incompetent. As regards Mr. Burne Jones, however, it cannot be said that there is any such visible drift of opinion, reluctant or otherwise, towards just criticism. In a recent newspaper-plebiscitum, some three or four of his works in one exhibition received the highest number of votes as being the best things in their respective styles ; this whether by reason of a final conquest of average taste by his unwavering persistence in his own way, or of a special zeal on the part of his followers to proclaim the faith that is in them, or—as some suggest—of a dishonest and deceptive tendency on the part of the voters to set down the names of the painters they suppose to be most in fashion. However this may be, the following propositions in regard to the art of Mr. Burne Jones may be confidently advanced as matters hardly admitting of dispute among people of ordinary candor : 1. That he rarely draws a human figure accurately in the matter of limbs ; his idealism involving a habitual and wide departure from ordinary proportions ; so that the legs of his figures,

besides being rigidly conventional in modelling, are impossibly long relatively to the torsos ; 2. That he has painted and apparently can paint only one face, giving to all his personages, male and female, divine and human, the same peculiar and stereotyped nose, eyes, mouth, and chin ; bestowing the one mask on whole groups and troops of men and women in single pictures ; and imposing it on all periods, making Perseus and Andromeda not only epicene twins but lawless importations from the haggard, unreal Middle Ages of the painter's one eternal dream. If the plebiscitum aforesaid meant anything, it would seem to suggest that this unspeakable reiteration has infected the public mind with the face type in question. One of the votes was that the most beautiful face in the gallery was a certain female countenance by Mr. Burne Jones, in which, one may say with confidence, no assemblage of cultured men and women unused to the painter's type could have seen any satisfying loveliness, so sophisticated was it, so wanting in the living charm of healthy flesh and blood, so suggestive of Whitman's phrase about the tendency of men at some stages of culture to pursue dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women.

On this phase of pictorial art and taste I have no more to say here beyond putting it in evidence, as I see it, in the examination of certain tendencies in literary art to which it supplies a peculiarly instructive analogy. I use the word *methodism* in the one case as in the other to denote a deliberate

and unchanging devotion to one rigidly limited set or cast of expressions—whether in color, form, or phrase—such one-ideadness being something more, and something worse, than mannerism. Mannerism is essentially unconscious ; methodism is purposive, however inveterate ; the former being found in every painter or writer, great or small ; the latter being a something egregious and extravagant, as in the case just dealt with. Every one of us of necessity exhibits mannerism, our manner being bound up with our individuality, be that self-centred or imitative ; but methodism in self-expression is a wilful hardening of the whole faculty into one attitude with one outlook ; or, to use a familiar metaphor, the turning of one's whole artistic activity into one groove—the reverse of a “groove of change”. This limitation of utterance and of expedient one pronounces to be a falling short of conceivably possible attainment, and therefore a vice to be abjured. If we accept the doctrine that right living consists in fulness, variety, and freshness of lawful sensation, the lapse into sameness of artistic method, involving as it does atrophy of a large area of sense and function, surely makes against progress, alike for the methodist and his fellows. In the words of Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, as recently reported by a New York interviewer, authors are to be judged—Mr. Stevenson thinks he may perhaps carry the test too far in his own criticisms—“by their power to break out in a fresh place. It is

only a halfling\* talent which can do but one thing, and which requires to repeat itself *ad infinitum*". Mr. Stevenson adds: "I confess I thought at one time that Henry James was of this order. He has most agreeably disappointed me. He seems one of the very few who are feeling around for new effects"—a judgment valuable and opportune in the general, whatever may be the justice of the special application. But instead of seeming to beg the question by thus adducing generalisations, let me proceed to examine on its merits the species of literary methodism I have in view.

It is a doctrine often formulated more or less loosely, and often enough reduced to practice, but set forth with the maximum of zeal, precept, and illustration, as distinguished from skill and persuasiveness, in the works of Mr. T. L. Kington Oliphant.† This writer, who has done good service in tracing the variations of English speech from its earliest stages, has thought fit to add to his work of that kind a polemic against what he regards as the worst of literary vices, the use, namely, of words of Latin or Romance descent where it is possible to get Teutonic equivalents. The penny-a-liner is his "dearest foe", and in-

\* A Scotch word meaning, as may be guessed, "half-grown or middling", though commonly used as a substantive in the sense of "stripling" or "hobbledehoy".

† 'The Sources of Standard English,' 1873; 'The Old and Middle English,' 1878, an expansion of sections of the previous work; and 'The New English', 1886, an expansion of the remainder.

deed Mr. Oliphant is the rightful enemy of the penny-a-liner. He visibly piques himself on being a scholar and a gentleman, anticipating all cavils ; a public-school man, he writes of " the places where the offspring of our shopkeepers are taught bad French and worse Latin "—as if Eton French had been in general a success, or Eton Latin had meant a frequent attainment of the power to read the latter tongue ; and he must needs award to " our middle class ", in common with the penny-a-liners, the blame of the faults of diction he denounces. Yet so unintelligent are his prejudices that in the course of his effusions on the subject he unthinkingly lets out that the most absurd excesses of Latinism have been committed by university dons—if, that is, his samples are real records and not nightmares. In point of fact, he will probably find the majority of his sympathisers among that very middle class on which he so ostentatiously looks down ; the objection to new-fangled words, and the praise of plain English, being nowhere commoner than among business men, both those who read and those who do not. And it is really only to the most average of average Englishmen that Mr. Oliphant's writing on the question of style in any way appeals. His standard of culture may be gathered from the dictum that " some of the best English verse of our time may be read in the pages of *Punch*, whenever great Englishmen die " ;\* surely a senti-

\* ' Sources,' p. 337.

ment not alien to the mind of the reader of the *Daily Telegraph*, Mr. Oliphant's peculiar aversion. Scholars may indeed go to Mr. Oliphant for some kinds of information ; but as regards ideas there is not a sentence in his book that has any message for the scholar who, in addition to being socially a gentleman, happens to be in any degree a critic or a writer. There is a strictly Teutonic rendering of a Latin maxim which urges that the cobbler should stick to his last. It is not merely that Mr. Oliphant has nothing to say that is not commonplace ; that his section on modern writing is a reiterative and orderless tirade against illiterate if not imaginary scribblers, whose literary tastes would probably be at many points on a level with his own ; or that his bumptiousness is in itself a kind of vulgarity : in addition to all this, his own style at its worst is as vicious in its way as that of any of the probable samples of penny-a-lining he brings forward ; while at its best, save at moments of special effort, it is savorless, colorless, charmless, without grace of movement, without delicacy or distinction—the writing of a business man who has happened to make his business deal with the study of the manufacture of words, and whose guiding principle is a burning conviction that the good old times were the best. In short, we have here a laying down of the law as to writing by a man who cannot write.

Not content with countering the tasteless use of big words—of which abuse of language he

offers us frantic specimens, such as can have been coined only in jest even by a penny-a-liner—Mr. Oliphant takes it upon him to lay down general principles for all writers whatsoever. “Our writers, male and female,” he declares, “will confine themselves, if they be wise, to words used by the best English authors of the school of Dryden and Swift, unless there be some good reason for using later ware.” It is perhaps an exaggeration to describe as a pretended general rule a canon which tells us we are not to do a thing unless there are good reasons for doing it; but in any case Mr. Oliphant is laying down the principle that writers ought to have regard to the date and descent of a word in their use of it, before any other consideration. Now, only a man lacking in literary faculty would lay down such a doctrine; and any writer, male or female, who obeys him, gives proof of similar unfitness. In support of his precept Mr. Oliphant offers no more show of argument than does Dr. Freeman for any of the racial prejudices which every now and then move him to boyish declamation. With the one writer as with the other it is an article of faith that there is an inherent virtue in things Teutonic, and that to blend a Teutonic tongue with a Romance is somehow to frustrate the scheme of Nature, and violate the decencies of civilisation. For such a view of things, it is needless to say, there is no more rational justification than for the tribal spirit in any other form, high or low. What is

done by writers like Mr. Oliphant and Dr. Freeman is to bring into the affairs of men the philosophy of schoolboys, somewhat magnified in vocabulary by reason of acquaintance with books, and in pretention by the consciousness of scholarship. Yet many people allow themselves to be coerced by this crude race-worship into an attitude of decorous sympathy ; and George Eliot, seeking to promote the tribalism of the Jews, did not scruple to found on the convention that had come into vogue at home ; a creed sincerely held by cultured people only in the sense that it pandered to and fostered an irrational sentiment, held by many civilised men in common with all barbarians. Mr. Oliphant shouting the praises of the Teutonic, and preaching a crusade against the admission of new words into the old tongue, has just that amount of reason on his side, relatively to his opportunities, that belongs to the Chinese view of outside civilisation. Whether and how far any two tongues may be profitably blended is a question that will assuredly never be settled by such an authority as this.

Mr. Oliphant quotes with joy the passage in Dr. Freeman's preface to his second volume of essays, in which the historian, telling how he had gradually learned to write a purer English, striking non-Teutonic terms out of his pages as leading only to vagueness in expression, urges young writers to go and do likewise. The critical readers of Dr. Freeman know the literary value of that



advice. His pure English is an English like Mr. Oliphant's, without either subtlety or dignity, and missing literary impressiveness to a degree not reached in the work of any historian of equal fame. No doubt it is perfectly clear—no small merit in a style otherwise good, as Macaulay rightly felt when he expressed his pleasure at the tribute from the proof reader who declared that he had never needed to read a sentence in the History twice to catch the meaning. But Macaulay could combine skill of phrase with simplicity of construction ; and with all his bad blemishes of staccato sentences and conventional wording he abounds in passages which live in the memory, setting up as they do the special impact that belongs to strong craftsmanship. I recall a simple sentence from his essay on Macchiavelli :

“ He pined for the strength and glory of ancient Rome ; for the fasces of Brutus and the sword of Scipio, the gravity of the curule chair and the bloody pomp of the triumphal sacrifice.”

Is there in all Dr. Freeman's volumes a sentence which rings so? For the latter writer's copious and various historic learning every student must feel respect ; but such learning no more entitles a man to speak with authority on the art of writing than it makes him a master in matters of historical philosophy. Dr. Freeman is the prince of chroniclers, perhaps, but as a sociologist he is nowhere ; his only title to a hearing being based on his adoption of the ideas of men with sociological in-

sight. So far from acquiring this faculty by much reading, he has not even yet attained the spirit of historic impartiality, which is incompatible with some of his pet sentiments. And that he is able to get along comfortably with a simple and limited vocabulary is just because his ideas are simple and limited even when he takes up the philosophy of other men, his habit of mind having the effect of turning all ideas into common-places, inasmuch as he levels all down to the plane of his predilections. To handle a principle fruitfully you must rise to the point of view of the minds which framed it. You are indeed able to make shift with the speech of your forefathers when your general sphere of thought does not greatly transcend theirs : neology is the outcome of more complex mental processes and a disintegration of primeval sentiment under the play of all the solvents provided by modern thought. Dr. Freeman, while much given to talking about the comparative method, avows that in matters of religion he is content to walk by faith and dispense with reason ; a certificate of medievalism on which I cannot pretend to improve.

The question is of course not to be settled for anyone by this impeachment of authority any more than by the citation of it. Let it be put to the proper technical test ; first, by an examination of some of Mr. Oliphant's Teutonic sentences. Here is a selection :

“ . . . the bloody day, big with our island's doom,

when the French knights were charging up the slope at Senlac again and again, when striving to break the stubborn English shield-wall" ('Sources,' p. 330).

"Fine writing has set its dingy mark upon America as well as England" (p. 331).

"Breast the muddy tide of fine writing" (p. 337).

"This Nineteenth Century of ours is a grand age of inventions. Thus we know to our cost what a Sensation Novel means . . . ." (p. 332).

". . . a mass of modern sewage, dear to the hearts of our penny-a-liners" ('New English,' ii, 213).

"It is a pity that some record of their [the New Testament Revisers'] proceedings from day to day cannot be published; how Archbishop Trench must have fought against the sagacious pranks of his brethren!" (*Id.*, p. 118).

These passages do not give any adequate idea of the constant commonplaceness of Mr. Oliphant's turn of phrase and thought—of his preëminence in the kind of utterance which the French term *banal*—but they show at once his want of art and his want of taste. In the first-quoted sentence we have not only the ancient metaphor "big with doom" turned to the most incongruous use, and the Norman knights turned into French on account of their speech, but a successive employment of "whens" which any teacher would mark as a fault in a small boy's composition-paper. Could there be, again, any worse sample of "fine writing" than those phrases about setting the dingy mark and breasting the muddy tide? If there be, it is the making of sewage dear to hearts; a piece of coarse and slovenly imagery which would be derided in a pot-house oration. For the rest, it would surely be difficult to find in any daily paper such mere fatuities of expression as the

wording of the two clauses about the sensational novel, and the ill-tied sentence last quoted, with its "fighting against sagacious pranks". The last two words give one of the few signs in his work that Mr. Oliphant knows there is something to be done in the literary way at times by uncommon collocations of terms, but on the whole he had perhaps better leave that kind of thing alone.

Take now, as decisive, a passage in which he draws up three typical sentences, one purporting to be good old Teutonic English, the next to be tolerable modern English, the third to be penny-a-lining.

"I. Stung by the foe's twitting, our forefathers (bold wights!) drew nigh their trusty friends, and were heartily welcomed; taught by a former mishap, they began the fight on that spot, and showed themselves unaffrighted by threatening forebodings of woe.

"II. Provoked by the enemy's abuse, our ancestors (brave creatures!) approached their faithful allies, and were nobly received; instructed by a previous misfortune, they commenced the battle in that place and proved themselves undismayed by menacing predictions of misery.

"III. Exacerbated by the antagonist's vituperation, our progenitors (audacious individuals!) approximated to their reliable auxiliaries, and were ovated with empressement; indoctrinated by a preliminary contretemps, they inaugurated hostilities in that locality, and demonstrated themselves as unintimidated by minatory vaticinations of catastrophe."

On this performance it is sufficient general comment to say that it reads like nothing so much as the attempt of a schoolboy to be funny among his fellows, and that it may fitly be relegated to that

office. " Mr. Soule of Boston," it appears, helped Mr. Oliphant with the last sentence ; and it is but just that they should have the solace of the announcement that they played the buffoon in company. As for the models, it is very needless to show at length that the first and second would no more be accepted by a competent writer than the last. " The first sentence," Mr. Oliphant avers, " is like a Highland burn ; the second is like the Thames at Hampton Court ; the third is like London sewage." The " Highland burn " is of a verity such as the " real waterfall " in a stage performance of ' Rob Roy ' ; the second sentence, with its ridiculous " brave creatures " and its futile conclusion, is a bungler's mosaic ; the third is a child's game.

It would indeed be absurd to decide as to the relative merits of a " Saxon " and a Latinised style from such an exhibition as the foregoing ; but the vagaries of Mr. Oliphant may have made it the easier to apprehend the simple truth that good writing consists in the use neither of Teutonic nor of Romance words, but simply of the best ; and that the fitness of words is to be determined by considerations utterly independent of their pedigree. The meaning and value of a word in a given context depend on its former associations, supposing it to have a past, and on the shade of special significance it may be held to carry etymologically, supposing it to be new or nearly so ; and it constantly happens that a gain

to vividness is made by lifting into a fresh relation a word which has become efficient by serving hitherto a restricted purpose. In the application of these principles it is mere unreasoning pedantry to begin by asking whether a term is Romance or Teutonic : the literary faculty employs quite other tests. The simple explanation of the frequent advantage of putting a Teutonic for a Latin word is that the usual shortness of the former means an economy of attention, and that its more ample associations give it a fuller load of meaning ; but on the other hand it may easily happen that a Latin term, long or short, has acquired associations which give it precedence for a given purpose over any Teutonic equivalent. On the one hand we have to take our vocabulary as we find it : on the other we have to supply our growing needs by new combinations, imports, and readjustments. Again and again do we find a foreign word serving to carry for us a meaning more precise than it had for its first owners, and one for which we had no true equivalent : thus *naïve* has a recognised specific meaning in English, which is not conveyed by " simple " or " ingenuous ", and which in French is not the complete meaning ; while, as Coleridge long ago pointed out, our Latin synonyms for Teutonic terms furnish us with an extremely valuable means of distinguishing between abstract and concrete ideas. The whole ground, indeed, has been gone over time and again by such thinkers and critics as Coleridge, Lowell,

and Spencer ; who employed logic where Messrs. Freeman and Oliphant fall back on crude prejudice. Mr. Lowell has pointed out that in poetry or dignified prose “ ancient mariner ” is as much better than “ elderly seaman ” as “ sweat ” is better than “ perspiration ” ; the explanation in both cases being past association ; and Mr. Spencer has pointed to the principle of economy as the most general law of style, to which all more precise canons are reducible. To set forth these particular rules would almost take a treatise : enough to say that the plan of asking when a word came into use, by whom it has been used, and whether it came by way of France or of Germany, is not even one of them.

And now for the moral. One cannot affect to suppose that writers of any force of character will let themselves be dictated to by scholars like Mr. Oliphant or Dr. Freeman in the teeth of their convictions ; but scholars of standing must needs have some influence ; and it may easily happen that unwise bias may be widely reinforced by such deliverances as we have been considering. In any case, there is actually in existence a fashion of fanatically Teutonic English style which, though mainly confined to poetry, must tend to react on prose ; and this manner of writing furnishes us with the most destructive possible answer to the advice to follow it. The two most eminent English practitioners—they have Mr. Oliphant’s praise as such—in the walk of archaic style are Mr. Wil-

liam Morris and Mr. Swinburne ; but as the former is decidedly the more strenuous and undeviating Teutonist of the two, he will the better serve as our example. In his copious body of verse there is to be seen a fidelity to Teutonic diction such as is not approached in any English work since the Norman invasion ; and though his practice is not necessarily decisive, it is unquestionably something of a test of the soundness of such methodism. For his poetic style (his normal or journalistic prose does not differ noticeably from other people's) is plainly methodistic to the last degree. It is indeed quite easy to find in English poetry beautiful verse that is almost devoid of Latin forms : some of Tennyson's choicest lyrics are wholly or nearly so—*e.g.*, “ As through the land at eve we went ” ; and there is on the whole much less of the Romance element in our good verse than in our good prose ; the reason being, broadly speaking, the instinctive striving of verse-writers after the archaic, as to some extent insuring poetic elevation, or at least difference from normal utterance. But then almost no English poet from Chaucer down to Mr. Morris has on principle, or out of mental constitution, set his face against tinging his Teutonic with words of any other descent ; and some of the most admirable verbal effects in our literature are got by such admixture. The great line “ The multitudinous seas incarnadine ”, which Mr. Oliphant, I think, omits to execrate, is just as perfect in its way as “ The shadow of a great



rock in a weary land ” ; and in denying himself all such resort to Latinity as is had by Shakspeare and Milton and Keats and Tennyson, Mr. Morris has simply shut himself outside a whole world of noble harmony. And what is the positive result of his exclusiveness? A prolixity not to be matched in any European literature in modern times ; a child-like garrulity far in excess of the childishness of primeval song, since it necessarily embodies much of the complexity of modern sentiment, which a primeval style can express only by periphrases without measure ;\* the upshot being the very perfection of the unnatural. Such a proportion as his of careful verbiage to poetic beauty is found in no bygone poet of enduring reputation ; and the load cannot fail to wreck a factitious or fashion-born fame. It is impossible to set bounds to the caprice of public taste in the matter of poetry or

\* Just after this was written I met with a neat illustration of the drawbacks of pure Teutonism. In a tramway car I heard a passenger jocularly ask for “a small piece of paper ”—his ticket—remarking that he did not suppose he was greatly lightening the conductor’s load. Pouching the penny, the latter began : “No, sir, you’re”—a moment’s pause—“you’re making it more heavy rather’n lightening it.” If Old English had been properly developed there would have been a verb “to heavy ” as well as “to lighten ” (Chaucer has “y-heavied.” Tr. of Boëce), and he had paused to feel for the missing verb, but there was none. He might have said briefly either “increase ” or “add to”, both Latin forms, but then he was not used to Latin forms, and he loyally periphrased. And it is thought to be a virtue in us if we willingly wear the fetters of the conductor, who, like Mr. Morris, added waste words even to his periphrasis.

anything else ; but it is hardly credible that Mr. Morris should find a wide public fifty years hence for his poetry.

Very instructive is the coupling of primeval taste in style with choice of primeval theme. Since Mr. Morris has begun to meddle with politics he has indeed taken to modern subjects, making one wonder what might have been if he had heard of Socialism earlier ; but the oft-thumbed three-stringed lyre of the skald cannot now be made a harp of modern range. The mass of his verse remains steeped in archaism of thought as well as of art, the most unmodern of modern work—unless indeed we grant that this unmeasured imitation of the distant past is peculiarly modern in its way. Mr. Swinburne, who often outdoes Mr. Morris in sheer flux of words, has fits of modernism, in which verse-form dams his torrent of epithet, and critical judgment, called into play by that restriction, moves him to avail himself of all the treasures of the English tongue ; so that he gives us at times such sounding lines as “ Thick darkness and the insuperable sea ”, which no merely Saxon line could equal, and such a perfect roll of rhythmic beauty as this in ‘ Atalanta ’ :

“ And the brown bright nightingale amorous  
Is half assuaged for Itylus,  
For the Thracian ships and the foreign faces,  
The tongueless vigil and all the pain ” ;

—verse which goes to prove that there are kinds of mind-music in the Latin elements of our lan-

guage which the earlier elements positively cannot yield. Such verse, for instance, as Tennyson's

"And many an old philosophy  
On Argive heights divinely sang",

in which the charm so largely depends on the special vibrating power of the non-Teutonic words, is peculiar to English literature, and is perhaps more nearly to be matched in French than in German, superior as German poetry unquestionably is to French in lyrical quality. For in German poetry—so at least it seems to me—the success is mainly confined to the lyrical forms; the blank verse having no such capturing quality, while the non-lyrical rhymed verse likewise generally lacks nervous force. The full-toned melody\* in question is indeed to some extent attained by force of the more polysyllabic nature of German as compared with our non-Latin vocabulary; as in Goethe's 'Ueber allen Gipfeln ist Ruh', with its short but flowing lines; but even in German we find curious gains arising from foreign notes,

\* One is accustomed to use the analogy of music to describe poetic effects, but of course there is only an abstract analogy, and no actual likeness. The main sensible factors in poetic charm are assonance, consonance, and cadence: all the rest, or nearly all, is association of ideas. It is a mistake to suppose that it is the actual vocal sounds, or the echoes of them, that charm us. The value of mere arrangements of vowels and consonants, as such, is in reality very small, as may be seen by constructing nonsense-verses vocally similar to fine poetry; such exercises in sound yielding no satisfaction whatever. For the trained reader, poetry "pipes to the spirit ditties of no tone".

for instance in Schiller's haunting harmony, ' Auch ich war in Arkadien geboren ', and in those ringing stanzas at the close of Heine's ' Deutschland ', in which the poet menaces the Prussian king with damnation to the " singing flames " of a Dantean hell :

“ Kennst du die Hölle des Dante nicht  
 Die schreckliche Terzetten?  
 Wen da der Dichter hineingesperrt  
 Den kann kein Gott mehr retten—  
 Kein Gott, kein Heiland erlöst ihn je  
 Aus diesen singenden Flammen!  
 Nimm dich in Acht, dass wir dich nicht  
 Zu solcher Hölle verdammen ! ”

Here we have from the Romance *Dante*, *Terzetten*, *Flammen*, and *-dammen*, very important items in the total.

But there is no need to go thus far afield to show that good writing, instead of being a matter of devout endogamy in language, consists in an intelligent receptiveness and eclecticism. The analogies of organic life tell as forcibly against the tribal doctrine as do the results of putting it in practice. Little as we know of the manner in which languages originated, it is plainly impossible that they can have gone far without an interchange between dialects, one adopting some terms from another ; and they who think to arrest this process have failed to grasp the secret of evolution. Language is fluid, and defies in time even the moulds set on it by powerful thinkers, much more the rules of middlemen and pedants. Words

change under our hands in spite of ourselves, use wearing them dull, and change and humor transmuting their sense, so that every generation's speech has a tinge of quaintness for the next, even as its garments, its art, its music, and its ideals. And when in these days formalists would have us stay the course of change, galvanising old words into unreal life and setting our faces against new, calling our neighbours "wights" and refusing to hear of "egoism", we can answer them in the words of a philosopher of seventeen hundred years ago, who never heard of the law of evolution, and had little countenance in his rational acceptance of the process of change. Said Favorinus of Arles to a young Roman who, like Mr. Oliphant, was fain to bring dead words out of their graves, not because they were needed, but because they were old: "Curius, Fabricius, and Coruncanius, those very ancient persons, and the three Horatii, more ancient still, spoke to their fellows unaffectedly and intelligibly, not using the vocabulary of the Aurunci, or the Sicani, or the Pelasgi, who they say first inhabited Italy, but the speech of their own time."\* Favorinus, to be sure, was a

\* Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae*, i, 10. Let Dryden further answer his devotee: "When an ancient word for its sound and significancy deserves to be revived, I have that reasonable veneration for antiquity to restore it. All beyond this is superstition. Words are not like landmarks, so sacred as never to be removed. Customs are changed; and even statutes are silently repealed when the reason ceases for which they were enacted." Preface to 'Fables'.

trifle prejudiced even in his resistance to caprice, endorsing a trepid counsel of Cæsar against all use of strange words, whereas living literature knows no test save that of the competent writer's sense of need and fitness ; but he had committed himself to the position that language could not stand still, much less turn back. An age with an immensely wider outlook than his must be at least as wise as he. If an unearthed vocable can serve our need we shall use it as readily as one new-minted ; and it may be that a writer who looks both forward and backward, a Gautier or a Baudelaire or a Keats, will rescue for us much of such buried treasure, prizing it because it is stamped with the beauty of fitness and can fulfil a purpose, and not merely setting an ancient potsherd above a modern dish. Between the dreamland of ' Volapük ' and the pigeon-holes of the tribalists, living speech holds its inevitable way. Art can always learn from antiquity, just because antiquity is so much experience. But all great art is so because it is of itself alive and germinal ; and the august art of speech has its sap and sustenance like the rest from the eternal fountains of change, which urge for ever the pulses of man's mind as surely as the wheeling of the suns. It is they that drink at the universal springs who will give its color and aroma to the language of their time. And the last and decisive count in the summing-up against the forms of liminary methodism we have been studying is that they represent in different fields of art

that backward tendency, ever and again presenting itself in the world of organic life, which in the phraseology of natural science is termed reversion to a prior type. The harking back to old forms of expression, and the rigorous adherence to them, in the teeth of the onward course of surrounding things, is just such a retrogression. It may be that it is as congenital and irresistible in the poet as in the pigeon ; but at least we know that in the affairs of men the bias of one is set up in others by their conscious imitation ; and it is meet that that stage of the process should be resisted.

## WHO WRITES CORRECTLY?

(1885.)

SOME time ago an anonymous writer, who had avowedly suffered to some extent from certain criticisms passed on his literary style by Mr. George Saintsbury, took the uncharitable but natural course of showing, through the public press, that Mr. Saintsbury had in a single recent magazine article committed more sins of style than an ordinary man could well afford to spread over a volume. The illustrative extracts, by general admission, gave the retaliator his full revenge. Some sympathy was perhaps created for Mr. Saintsbury by his assailant's making it one of his worst misdemeanors to have ended a clause with a preposition ; but on the whole the exposure was as destructive as it was ruthless. It must have excited in well-balanced minds a conflict of feelings : on the one side a nameless satisfaction in seeing vengeance done on one who had in his time laid about him so extensively ; on the other a certain compunction over the discomfiture of such a redoubted taker of scalps. At this distance from the event, it is the latter feeling which predominates ; and the purpose of the present brief inquiry is at once to console Mr. Saintsbury, should that be in any way necessary—which is im-



probable, in view of some of his critical work since—and to modify the unseemly exultation of some people over his misfortunes. The question is, granting that Mr. Saintsbury contrived to pack an excessive quantity of bad writing into one essay, is he therefore to be excommunicated on the score of having committed sins such as his brethren generally have not to answer for? [The last sentence is deliberately ended with a preposition, by way of bold defiance to Mr. Saintsbury's castigator.] In short, does any man write correctly, in the sense of being incapable of serious slips in expression? The answer, it is here submitted, is that there is none righteous, no, not one—or hardly one.

Let us take first the contemporary writer who, on a general survey of his walk and conversation, might be supposed the nearest to "perfection's sacred height"—Mr. Matthew Arnold; and, without asking how many other forms of bad writing he may be guilty of [*sic*], let us see whether he has never outraged the fundamental moralities of grammar. In the preface to his selections from Wordsworth there occurs this saying: "Now, a drama *or* an epic *fill* the mind, and one does not look beyond *them* "; which is profoundly questionable from more points of view than one; and in 'Culture and Anarchy' (p. 105) we find this clause: ". . . there *exists*, sometimes only in germ and potentially, sometimes more or less developed, the same *tendencies and passions*." In the

latter case, no doubt, Mr. Arnold might plead error of the press ; but the other, it is submitted, brings such a plea under suspicion. " It 'ud look bad afore a jury." And here is yet another case in which Mr. Arnold's loose hold of number, as distinguished from " numbers ", is manifest : " A popular story or a popular religious book is sure enough of being translated into English ; there is a public for a translation of *that*."\* Here the previous grammatical error is avoided, and an error of exposition committed instead ; " a translation of that " should be " translations of these ". Another kind of error is the phrase " the incurable want " in the preface to Mr. Arnold's Golden Treasury edition of Byron. If a dead poet's work totally lacks something, the " want " is rather too " incurable " to need mentioning as being so.

Keeping still among the distinguished critics, we next turn the bull's-eye on Mr. Lowell. Sooth to say, Mr. Arnold stands examination much better, whether as regards lapses in grammar or as to sins of taste, than any other distinguished critic of the day. But it must suffice here to deal merely with clear breaches of established law. Such are these passages of Mr. Lowell's essay on Dante : " The result " [of studying histories of Florence] " is a spectrum on the mind's eye, which looks definite and brilliant, but really hinders all accurate vision, *as if from* too steady inspection of

\* ' Higher Schools and Universities of Germany,' p. 213.

a Catherine-wheel in full whirl ". " Dante's *want of faith* in freedom was of the *same kind with Milton's refusing* (as Tacitus had done before) to confound license with liberty." Then in the Keats essay (p. 313 of vol.) he uses the vicious " of all others " in the ordinary licentious fashion ; and he does not scruple to speak of " the eagle balanced in *incommunicable sunshine* ".\* What is to be said, again, of such a form of speech as this : " It is plain enough that those were not mental or moral graces that should attract a man like Keats " (= He demanded physical graces). A worse sentence still is the following, in the essay on J. G. Percival : " It [the world] *did* not want his poetry, simply because *it* was not, *is* not, and by no conceivable *power of argument can be made interesting—the first duty of every artistic product.*" It is to be feared that non-artistic products too sometimes fall short of their " first duties ".

Another English critic of the first rank is Mr. Leslie Stephen ; an able writer, but somewhat superfluously fallible in his syntax. He is even capable of using " phenomenal " in the sense of

\* It must be admitted, on this head, that there is great difficulty in ascertaining what " incommunicable " means. Wordsworth has " the incommunicable sleep ", and Dr. Hutchison Stirling has " incommunicable gulf ". The sleep would seem to be one *in* which there is no communication ; and the gulf one *across* which there is no communication ; while the sunshine would appear to be something *with* which there is no " means of communication ". The various meanings of the word may thus be said to be " incommunicable ".

“extraordinary”, thus exploding the theory that that perversion is possible only to newspaper reporters.† “Pope’s delight in artifice,” he alleges, “was something phenomenal”.‡ Again, in his ‘English Thought in the Eighteenth Century’,\* Mr. Stephen alludes to “the manner in which the *effects* of taxation are *propagated* to different classes”. “Propagated through” would have been right; but an “effect” is not “propagated” in the first instance. Perhaps we shall be going beyond our proper lines of inquiry if we notice such a bull as: “Hume indeed is full of acute remarks, or he would not be Hume” [query, who would he be?]; but we may notice a slovenly way Mr. Stephen has of joining his sentences, which often makes his reader stumble: “In these days . . . even this qualified and external worship of masculine vigor is *valuable*. There is something hectic and spasmodic about it, though it implies a homage to more healthy ideals. Kingsley, at any rate, hated the namby-pamby . . . .” Here the “though” should clearly have been at the beginning of the sentence; and the displacement is perhaps worse than bad grammar. Here, again, in the essay on Kingsley, is a slovenly touch: “*When* one reads *some* passages

† That class, by the way, is constantly being unfairly attacked. The “devouring element”, for instance, has been fathered on it, whereas “Mulciber’s devouring element” occurs in ‘The Faerie Queene’, Book II, canto vii, stanza 5.

‡ ‘Hours in a Library,’ i, 126.

\* *Ib.*, ii, 326.

inspired by this hearty and simple-minded love of nature, one is *sometimes* half-tempted to wish ", etc. In such carelessnesses Mr. Stephen's pages abound to a distressing degree. As here: " If we run over the chief names of our literature, it would be hard to point to *one* which was not honored, *and sometimes honored to excess*, during its proprietor's [!] lifetime." And here: " a brave and unembittered nature, *not to be easily respected too highly* ". This again, from the essay on Johnson in the ' Hours in a Library ', is an utterance which goes a long way to deepen one's sense of human shortsightedness: " Or how, indeed, could any man come to embody his thoughts in the style of which one other sentence will be a sufficient example?" There is even another sentence between this and the sufficient example. Then we have the statement (p. 213) that Johnson's Parliamentary reports " make Pitt and Fox express sentiments which are *probably* their own in language which is *as* unmistakably Johnson's ; and on the same page there is the further intimation as to Johnson's style: " *It is only* in his last book, the ' Lives of the Poets ', that the mannerism, *though* equally marked, is so far subdued as to be tolerable ". Mr. Stephen, it will be seen, excels in various forms of loose writing, but perhaps his strongest point is tautology. " Helpless incapacity " \* is a good sample ; another is " that *unrivalled* dexterity

\* ' Hours,' ii, 140.

and neatness of touch in which the French are *our undisputed masters*''†; and a third is "ponderous *well-fed* masses of *animated beef-steak*".‡ But we must tear ourselves away from Mr. Stephen.

Professor Dowden, to take yet another critic, has an air of academic scrupulosity in his writing which seems to exclude the possibility of mere slovenliness; but lo! he has written this§: "Mr. Maurice's theology, as a recent critic, the Rev. James Martineau, has observed, *is at once* an effort to oppose the pantheistic tendency, *and is itself reached* and touched by that tendency". "*Did not ever* trouble himself"|| is a gratuitous clumsiness, and "abundant in power of wing, and *free in ærial singleness*"¶ is not exactly good writing. Your painstaking and polishing writer seems no more safe than the professional critic. George Eliot, by all accounts a most scrupulous as she was certainly an able stylist, makes many slips even in her later works. Lord Acton has noted earlier faults, such as the misuse of "mutual", but even his omniscient eye seems to have overlooked such touches as these in 'Middlemarch': "a fit of coughing *that required Mary Garth to stand near him*"; "*having made up her mind . . . there could not have been* a more skilful move . . ."; "as to freaks like this of Miss Brooke's, Mrs.

† 'Hours,' ii, p. 187.      § 'Studies,' p. 70.

‡ *Ib.*, p. 114.      || *Ib.*, p. 151.

¶ *Ib.*, p. 134.

Cadwallader had no patience with them, *and now saw . . . .* " (should be " and she now saw "); " a deeper and more constitutional *disease* than she had been willing to *believe* " (should be " suspect " or " imagine "). More serious than such oversights, perhaps, are such laborious backslidings as this: ". . . . Mr. Tyke, a zealous able man, who, officiating at a chapel of ease, had *not* a cure of souls *too extensive to leave him ample room* for the new duty "; and this: ". . . . that jealousy of disposition which was *not so exhausted on* his scholarly compeers *that there was none to spare* in other directions." One would like to know, by the way, what Lord Acton meant by a " vacant record of incoherent error "—his description of Lewes's ' History of Philosophy '. Ought the error to have been coherent? And would not " incoherent record of vacant error " have been equally good—and therefore equally bad?

It appears, then, that Mr. Saintsbury sins in pretty good company. In any case, he goes on sinning. His fecundity in literary error is indeed marvellous. In his little book on Marlborough, effective as it is in some ways, and well written as it is at some points, there are samples enough of bad style to confound an author if they were selected from a dozen of his volumes. The very first sentence is unhappy: " John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, is the subject of not the least known or the worst executed of standard biographies in English." On p. 3 we have a vicious

use of "nor" in a sentence otherwise tortured enough: "His father . . . . had been a man of some property, a soldier, and in his way an author, nor is his folio of English history, 'Divi Britannici', more deserving of the scorn which Macaulay's pen throws as a matter of course on the production of a Cavalier squire than might have been expected." What Bœotian grace! Again: "At the accession of James II to the throne there was hardly anyone who seemed to stand higher for that royal favor which never counted for more *than at this period* than John Churchill" (p. 16). Here we have mere stumbling awkwardness, such as could have been avoided by a very little circumspection; but the desire to be *distingué* in style leads to just as many failures of another sort. As thus: "The *origin of the money* has the at least respectable authority of Chesterfield" (p. 6); "more than ever intimate with, or rather ascendant over, the Princess Anne" (p. 17); "whose point of view is that *furnished by* a tolerably *observant acquaintance with* history and human nature" (p. 27); "we must leave such words as 'purest and most upright' out of the *dictionary of the incident*" (p. 29); "before *using ethical differences about a man*" [in judging him: an inanely ambiguous expression] (p. 34); "No English soldier (for Ginkel's experience and merit were not likely to make any Englishman forget that he was Dutch, *or Ruvigny's that he was French*) approached Marlborough in military reputation"



(p. 63); "Marlborough had, of course, greatly the disadvantage of Napoleon" (p. 137).

The mere inability of Mr. Saintsbury to join clauses smoothly has at times a pathological aspect. His sentences often read like a bad translation from the German, as here (p. 69): "In the very earliest days of that year Marlborough not only conceived, after correspondence with Prince Eugene of Savoy, the ablest general of the Empire, but (which was more difficult) carried into execution, despite the factiousness of the English Ministry and Parliament and the timidity and jealousy of the Dutch, a counter-scheme." Another sample (p. 84): "But, the master-blow which deprived the French of their military supremacy and freed the House of Austria from imminent danger once delivered, the hampering influences which beset the Grand Alliance had free play." And not content with sins of inelegance and of infelicitous oddity, Mr. Saintsbury gives us an occasional specimen of what is perhaps the worst of all kinds of bad writing—that in which an effect is sought to be made by giving an air of profundity to a truism. Thus, writing of Marlborough's siege of Lille, he tells (p. 108), how celebrated personages "flocked to the camp to watch the expected duel between the *sciences* of military attack and defence"—as if the same might not be said, with as much—or as little—propriety, of any battle in the open field.

Many writers, like Mr. Saintsbury, are much

concerned to lay down the law for others, while contravening it not seldom on their own part. Mr. Lang, hitting out a trifle viciously at "the maunderings, the stilted and staggering sentences, the hesitating phrases, the far-sought and dear-bought and worthless word-juggles, the native pedantries of many modern so-called 'stylists'," sets up the immortal, the eternal Dumas as a foil to them. "*He* did not gnaw the end of his pen in search of some word that nobody had ever used in this or that connection before. The right word came to him, the simple straightforward phrase. Epithet-hunting may be a pretty sport, and the bag of the epithet-hunter may contain some agreeable epigrams and rare specimens of style; but a plain tale of adventure, of love and war, needs none of this industry, and is even spoiled by inopportune diligence." Agreed; but are there no tooth-marks on Mr. Lang's pen? "Inopportune diligence" is very fair; and still better is his parenthetical and jocular apology for a trite metaphor in an earlier page. "Elderly illustration!" he calls it. Did anybody ever couple these terms before? And is it so unpardonable a diligence, this which Horace inculcated? Mr. Lang is very hard on Mr. Henley, for instance, who at times brings home a very pretty bag of epithets; and I do not find that he himself is always as natural as he might be. Quoting from a recent work the translated phrase of the Jesuit Le Moyne about Charles V: "What need that future ages should

be made acquainted so religious an Emperor was not always chaste!”, he adds: “*The same reticence allures one in regard to* so delightful an author as Dumas.” Is that good English, or straightforward speech? Mr. Lang or anybody else is to be forgiven a small slip, as this in his ‘Life of Sir Stafford Northcote’\*: “Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Disraeli, one of whom may perhaps be described as the most powerful statesman and the other as the most interesting political personage that *have* appeared in England during the present century.” That might happen to any of us; but to speak as above of alluring reticence, in an essay so largely turned to the vituperation of other men’s sins, is to exhibit undue fallibility. Mr. Lang is always erupting, wittily, of course, over some of the literary faults of young writers and Americans; and to see him chasing a butterfly with a cricket-bat, in the delusive security of newspaper anonymity, is an entertainment frequently open to the lover of letters. The false pretence of style so irritates him that he snaps again and again at the word “stylist”, as if what was good enough for Sainte-Beuve were not good enough for him. Yet in his own solidest books he frequently writes as they might do in the Chicago press. Thus we have him alluding† to “well-known Bushmen and Admiralty Island divine representations”; and

\* ii, 145.

† ‘Myth, Ritual, and Religion,’ ii, 255.

telling us† that “*at all times the undying savage in the soul of man has been quick to revive and to reassert itself in myth.*” Yet again, he can say § that “the lines are never drawn with *definite fixity*,” and can speak of one mythology overgrowing another “like some luxurious and baneful parasite”. He is very fond of repeating Mr. Stevenson’s remark that the style of poor Burns’s love letters is the style of a Bird of Paradise. Yet in the sober business of ledgering mythologies he himself writes like this¶: “We allege that all Greek life below the surface was rich in institutions now found amongst the most barbarous peoples.” Of mere carelessness he gives us as many samples as most writers. In one chapter, after asserting|| that to neither of the Hesiodic poems “would he willingly attribute a date much later than the ninth century of *our era*”, and on the next page alleging that Grote “assigns the Theogony to circ. 750 A.D.”\*—a pair of mishaps such as is not often met with on one leaf—he composes such a sentence as this: “*Sometimes, perhaps, especially in the scholia on the ‘Iliad’ and ‘Odyssey’, they furnish us now and then with a precious myth or popular märchen not otherwise recorded.*” That

† ‘Myth, Ritual and Religion,’ i, 340.

¶ *Id.*, i, 288.

§ *Id.*, i, 123.

|| *Id.*, i, 289.

\* This too is unintentionally entertaining:—“*Just as Huitzilopochtli wore the humming bird indicated (sic) by his name on his foot, so Picus was represented with the woodpecker of his name on his head*” (*Id.*, ii, 70).

is, of course, merely the slip of a sleepy pen ; but again and again we have phrases in the Chicago style, as : “ This part of the Orphic speculation is *left in judicious silence* by some modern commentators ” ;\* and “ Indeed, if we choose to regard Apollonius Rhodius . . . as the representative of Orphicism, it is easy to mask and pass by the more stern and characteristic fortresses of the Orphic divine.”† And in one of his criticisms of Mr. Max Müller‡ he triumphantly points out that “ why ” the Greeks did so-and-so in their mythology “ is exactly what Mr. Müller does not appear to explain ”. Altogether, Mr. Lang has had misadventures enough to teach other men diffidence, not to say tolerance.

Correctness, one may surmise, will be most readily attained by a writer who adds to a sense of style a certain nervous alertness, such as will make him incapable of writing drowsily. Among modern English writers Carlyle and Ruskin perhaps best realise that description ; and the suggestion may be hazarded that in respect of mere grammatical or syntactical slips—other questions of style being set aside—Carlyle is more nearly impeccable than any of his contemporaries : at all events, the sciolist now writing can recall none of his lapses. But the Carlylean precision does not always go with the Carlylean temper : witness this proposition of Mr. Froude’s§ : “ Boyd, who had

\* i, 318.

† *Id.*, p. 305.

‡ *Id.*, p. 319.

§ ‘ Life of Carlyle,’ ii, 101.

brought out the volumes of 'German Romance', wrote that he would be proud to publish for Carlyle upon almost any *other* subject *except* German literature". Carlyle's antithesis, Mill, not being a nervously alert man, goes astray frequently. One of his achievements is the question: "Should we have reached the electric telegraph by any amount of striving for a means of instantaneous communication, if Franklin had not *identified electricity with lightning, and Ampère with magnetism?*"† Of the same order is the following infelicity, in a note of the 'Political Economy'‡: "*Among the schemes of currency to which, strange to say, intelligent writers have been found to give their sanction, one is as follows . . .*". Mill's biographer, Professor Bain, has justly animadverted on his laxities of style; but Professor Bain, who has written an excellent grammar, has himself erred at least once. This remark on Senior, for instance,§ miscarries: ". . . . I *never saw any great wisdom* in his political views. *If I were to give an example, it would be*"—Senior's persistent advocacy of the endowment of the Irish Catholic priesthood; which the Professor regarded as the reverse of a wise policy. And he, one of the most impeccable of logicians, would admit that the phrase "I remember a curious *illustration in point*" (p. 177) is not quite what it should be. It

† 'Auguste Comte and Positivism,' p. 174.

‡ People's Ed., p. 332.

§ 'Life of Mill,' p. 192.

is usually held to be of the nature of an illustration to be "in point".

Mr. Frederic Harrison is perhaps not deficient in nervous excitability, so it is probably an oversight of haste on his part to speak of "all these ages and races, probably *by far the most numerous that our planet has witnessed*". His foe, Mr. Spencer, has not Mr. Harrison's vivacity, but his habits of patient thought preserve him wonderfully from serious blundering. "Not likely to be decreased but to be increased" (the "not" should be *after* "likely") is one of his inadvertences, which are never serious, though, like George Eliot, he is given to the unrelated participle. He might, by the way, have effectively retorted on Mr. Harrison, in his late discussion with that gentleman, by citing from the Newton Hall New Year address of 1875 the passage about "the inspiring sense of the Great Power *which* makes us what we are, and *who* will be as great when we are not". In the same discourse we have this: "*If* Auguste Comte *had* ever used language which could fairly be so understood, I will not stop to inquire." Much confusion is to be escaped by saying "whether" in the right place.

Mr. John Morley rarely nods, but he is capable of such a trifle as this\*: "Such a judgment is only possible for one who has not studied the book itself, *or else who* is ignorant of the social require-

\* 'Diderot,' i, 139.

ments of France at the time". The late Walter Bagehot, again, is very frequently at fault. Take this: "Even his warmest admirers have never contended that M. Thiers *had* a scrupulous love of truth, *was* a careful collector of evidence, *or* a fine judge of it when collected. But M. Guizot *was* all three."† In the essay on Cornewall Lewis we have the statement that certain of that writer's treatises are not exempt from a certain "*defect*, though his strong sense and really practical turn of mind always *kept it in check*". On Bolingbroke there is the following very perplexing reflection: "Why a mind like his should have been created, and then *the power to use it all fully withheld*, is one of the mysteries of which in this world we have no solution." A thoroughly conscientious man would surely abstain from competing with his creator in the manufacture of mysteries of the order in question. Mr. W. R. Greg, another writer of some authority, was also a loose stylist; his 'Literary and Social Judgments' containing such enormities as the figure: "*polished to the core*, not varnished merely on the surface"; and the statement that Necker introduced "*a system of order and regularity into the public accounts, to which they had long been strangers*". The just judge will, of course, make allowance in many of these cases for the exigencies of a professional literary career, in which men have often to

† 'Biographical Sketches,' p. 359.



write hurriedly and against the grain ; and perhaps some similar allowance should be made for those lady novelists to whom rapid composition appears to have become a necessary excitement. We have all noted some of the peccadilloes of Ouida, such as : “ *always* in a *chronic* state of financial embarrassment ” ; “ as an orthodox person *laughs* when *they* hear what is amusing but irreverent ” ; “ she was so used to *breaking her words* ” ; “ one could be as loyal a gentleman as a singer *as a soldier* ” ; and so forth. Leniency should be shown, again, where a writer doing task work turns out even such an appalling quantity of bad writing as is to be found in Mr. W. M. Rossetti’s critical prefaces ; and, finally, the righteous man will never be very hard on the slips of the toiling journalist. Still, he may entertain himself over them in some instances, as this from the *Saturday Review* : “ What he [Hillebrand] admired in Herder was the historical sense—the dim, vague, and yet ever present conviction that all life was a constant development which Burke was the first to hint at, Herder the first to state, and Darwin the first to prove. So, at least Karl Hillebrand thought.” The question here is, what was it that Hillebrand thought? The accuracy of the included statements need not, of course, be inquired into.

Let one or two more illustrations suffice to prove that the highest literary capacity gives no security against minor lapses of composition. Two of the

most interesting writers of the day are 'Vernon Lee' and Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson; the first being a literary artist of wide culture and much capacity for taking pains; the second obviously a man of genius. In 'Vernon Lee', however, are to be found the following sentences, both exhibiting commonplace forms of slovenly writing: "*Scarcely* was the existence of Arcadia known *than* everyone in Rome longed to be admitted into it."\* "*Perfectly satisfied* with his facile vein and the easily excited applause of his hearers, and firmly persuaded that he would be immortal, *Frugoni's talents were . . . irretrievably ruined.*"† Mr. Stevenson, in turn, in his fine essay on Villon,‡ has the sentence: "At Christmas in 1456, readers of Villon will *remember that* he was engaged on the Small Testament"; where there should clearly have been a comma after "remember", and no "that". In the same essay there is an exhibition of forgetfulness in the use of the adjective "mighty" in its colloquial last-century sense five times over: "a mighty late hour" (p. 206); "mighty confidential" (p. 215); "mighty polite" (p. 216); "mighty indifferent" (p. 225); and "mighty pathetic" (p. 232). And even in the admirably written and every way masterly 'Prince Otto' there are one or two crude touches, as "hard by, like an *open gash*, the im-

\* 'Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy,' p. 15.

† *Ib.*, p. 26.

‡ 'Familiar Studies of Men and Books,' p. 211.

perial highroad". It need hardly be suggested to the observant reader that when geniuses are thus to be caught napping it is little worth his while to chuckle over the lapses he has doubtless discovered in the present commentary.

Some people think that errors of style such as those above cited could be prevented or minimised if we had the Academy for which Mr. Arnold pleads. It is extremely unlikely that such a result would be attained ; but there are certain functions which an Academy might usefully exercise. It might, for instance, formally rate Mr. Saintsbury, not for his countless sins of the kind for which he was lately pilloried, but for committing, in a passage on the very subject of style, such a vulgarity as this : " The substitution of the full stop for the conjunction, which, speaking generally, may be said to be the initiating secret of style (though, of course, it must not be applied *too indiscriminately*) is at once apparent ", etc.\* Such commonplace misconduct almost argues incurable depravation. Then, again, what might not an Academy do to Mr. Traill for his allegation that Coleridge's criticism was " loyally recognitive of the opacity of milestones " ! Perhaps some of us may live to see such things punished.

\* ' History of French Literature,' p. 354.

## THE TORY PROFESSOR.

(1897.)

MR. GEORGE SAINTSBURY is the writer who a year or two ago created a certain thrill of attention by describing himself, gravely or otherwise, as a convinced Tory of the old school, who in 1829 would have opposed Catholic Emancipation, in 1832 would have opposed the Reform Bill, in 1846 the repeal of the Corn Laws, and so on down till our own day, when he is found as willing as other Conservatives to do whatever his party may see to be fit. He is also the professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh University. And the two facts, which are not without correlation, keep impressing themselves at every page, for very different reasons, on the readers of Mr. Saintsbury's 'History of Nineteenth Century Literature'. Mr. Saintsbury's 'History' and his politics help to explain each other ; his 'History' and his professorship do not, despite the element of connection just hinted at. We all knew that Mr. Saintsbury ten years ago was the most incorrect writer living, at least in England. I have heard a literary man, biassed to precision of speech by training in economics, describe Mr. Saintsbury's 'History of Elizabethan Literature' as the worst-written book, so far as he knew, in existence. But he would probably acknowledge that

there is now, as Dr. Johnson would say, "no determining the point of precedency" between the two works named. And this is a puzzling thing. Mr. Saintsbury must have known what people thought of his writing; and he must also know that, while the man-of-all-work of the *Saturday Review* in the old days might write as he pleased, a professor of Rhetoric and English Literature is expected, even in Scotland, to write grammatical, construable, and intelligible English. As a former inhabitant of Edinburgh, I insist that, whatever may be thought of a university which chooses Mr. Saintsbury for the chair of English, we of the laity really used to have a decent concern for the grammar of the idiom that had been forced upon us at the Union; and I cannot believe that even Mr. Saintsbury's influence can already have uprooted the tradition. Yet Mr. Saintsbury, now he is chaired, writes if possible worse than ever, a course which is the more wanton, seeing that he need only have given out his proofs among his junior students, as exercises for correction, in order to figure as a reformed literary character. And, though of course it is not wholly distressing to those of the Liberal way of thinking to know that he who is at once the worst writer and the most pretentious censor in contemporary literature is a high Tory, mere public spirit revolts at the kind of literary reputation Mr. Saintsbury is bringing on the land of his adoption. The attention of the Edinburgh Town

Council and the other university authorities is accordingly called to the following handfuls of samples of Mr. Saintsbury's style. To begin with :

# I.—AS TO GRAMMAR.

"It dared not present *either* without stewing *them* . . . ." (p. 5).

"A better writer than *either of these three*" (p. 160).

"Nothing of the kind more brilliant . . . is very likely ever to be written" (p. 23).

"Is therefore *never likely* to be much read again as a whole" (p. 78).

"He would be a very strange reader who should mistake the two" [*i.e.*, the one for the other] (p. 42).

"His . . . . works . . . . are never likely to be collected" (p. 65).

"He (Scott) added Goethe's 'Goetz von Berlichingen' to his translations" (p. 71).

"Frequent blemishes in strictly correct form and phrase" (p. 73).

"It probably did not surprise anyone who knew the pair *when* . . . . they separated for ever" (p. 77).

"Poetry such as there is not perhaps more than a small volume-full in all languages" (p. 54).

" . . . . with as much justice *as it was unjust* in its original application" (p. 56).

"*As a thinker* . . . . the opinion of the best authorities . . . . is that Coleridge was much more stimulating than intrinsically valuable" (p. 59).

Ten samples from eighty pages may suffice ; though many men who know Mr. Saintsbury's style will undertake at a hazard to find at least as many more in the same space on a little closer scrutiny. Turn we next to a few illustrations of the fashion in which the Edinburgh Professor of Rhetoric is wont to connect his clauses and shape his sentences. We have seen how he dispenses

with grammar, let us see how he "jines his flats":

## II.—AS TO CONSTRUCTION.

"It neglected the personal impression and the *attention to nature too much*" (p. 5).

"His first publication . . . coincided almost exactly with the first appearance of Cowper, *and indeed* a little anticipated it" (p. 7).

"A hasty judgment, *and even* one which, though not hasty, *is not very keen-sighted*. . . ." (p. 7).

[Certain songs of Burns] "*make any advance on them impossible in point of spontaneous and unreflecting emotion*. . . ." (p. 16).

At this rate of four samples to the dozen pages, we might go on quoting through the entire book. Opening it at random in the third chapter, we light on these:

"She (Miss Edgeworth) continued to write novels as late as 1834 ('Helen'), *while* some very charming letters of hers, *though* privately printed a good many years ago, were not published till 1894" (p. 127).

"This potent but *most* double-edged weapon. . . ." (p. 130).

"It is not *uncommon* to find *those* who consider such personages . . . to be merely farcical" (p. 130).

"A name given to him *by* a more than popular appropriateness" (p. 134).

"Mrs. Norton at one time *enjoyed* a considerable reputation as a poetess *by* contributions. . . ." (p. 315).

"It is a common and just complaint *of novelists*" [= against novelists] (p. 134).

"The *London Magazine*, that short-lived but *fertile nurse* of genius" (p. 233).

"The chief *follower* of Sir Walter Scott in Scotch novels—for Miss Ferrier, the Scottish counterpart of Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austen, *was*, though his friend, hardly his follower, and 'Marriage' *was* mainly written before 'Waverley'—*was* John Galt, *who also has some claim to priority*" (p. 139).

Even in some of these curtailed passages the reader may observe, over and above bad grammar and stumbling syntax, something which can best be described as imbecility of expression. This is so pervasive a quality of Mr. Saintsbury's writing that it is difficult to exhibit any of the others without a touch of it. But it must be sampled for its own sake :

### III.—AS TO SENSE.

"*The best, but only a few of the best*, of these (poems) are . . . ." (p. 100).

"He also wrote some important, *and*, in parts, very offensive. . . . Recollections of Sir Walter Scott" (p. 100).

"Merit which none but a very prejudiced critic can, *or at least ought to*, overlook" (p. 97).

"He was well educated, and was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, where he *had but surmounted political difficulties*; for his time as an undergraduate coincided with 'Ninety-eight'" (p. 95).

"In neither case did the summons amount to anything like a cue or a call-bell; *it was at best seed* . . . ." (p. 90).

"*The same probability* is, I think, to be *more sparingly predicated* of Keats" (p. 87).

"Absolutely unsurpassed, only rivalled by a few other things as perfect as themselves" (p. 85).

"For a time he lived at Marlow, where he *wrote or began* 'Prince Athanase', 'Rosalind and Helen', and *above all*, 'Laon and Cythna. . . .'" (p. 83).

"The qualities of Byron are very much of a piece, *and* . . . . *not much varied*" (p. 80).

"Byron . . . . was a direct scholar of Scott, and in point of age represented, if not a new generation, a second division of the old. This was still more the case in point of age, *and almost infinitely more so in point of quality*, as regards Shelley and Keats" (p. 81).

"The appeal of Byron consists *very* mainly, *though* no doubt not wholly, in two things. . . . ." (p. 79).



"Lack of passages in the grand style (whatever the grand style may be) . . . but a few score verses that can pretend to the grand style (whatever that may be)" (pp. 73, 74).

"It is not certain that *as* a mere prose-writer, Coleridge was a very good prose-writer" (p. 60).

"She was very unfortunately *parted* [endowed with 'parts'] *in respect of time*" (p. 45).

"Godwin has been frequently *charged with alarm* at the anarchist phantom he had raised" (p. 35).

"It [Godwin's influence] has *perhaps never yet been succinctly examined* and appraised" (i.e., all previous examinations have been lengthy) (p. 32).

"The absence of any consistent and persistent target" (p. 25).

"A sparing *but* an exquisite writer" (p. 153).

"True to his general character of independence, Dickens owes hardly anything to any predecessor except Smollett, to whom his debts are rather large, and perhaps to Theodore Hook, *to whom*, although the fact has not been generally recognised, *they exist*" (p. 146).

"'Castle Dangerous,' which was *not only finished but begun* when the fatal disease of the brain which killed him had got the upper hand" (p. 136).

"*It may be urged by the devil's advocate, and is not wholly susceptible of denial by his opponent . . .*" (p. 137).

". . . . The magnificent character of Becky Sharp (*the attempt to rival whom by her almost exact contemporary, Valerie Marneffe, is a singular critical error*)" (p. 155). [The meaning seems to be that it is a critical error to put Valerie Marneffe in competition with Becky Sharp as a character-study. The phrase "completely parted", in the same sentence, is quite unintelligible.]

"Lockhart married Sophia, Scott's elder daughter; and the pair lived *for some years to come* either in Edinburgh or . . . near Abbotsford" (p. 192).

". . . . He *continued* to direct the *Review*, to contribute for a time to *Fraser*, to be a very important figure in literary and political life, and *after Scott's death to write an admirable Life*" (p. 192).

"Nor would even thus his plumes be borrowed over much" (p. 193).

"His (De Quincey's) life, however, and his personality, and even the whole of his voluminous work, have in all probability taken color in the general thought from his first literary work of any consequence, the wonderful 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater', which, with the 'Essays of Elia', were the chief flowers of the *London Magazine*, and appeared in that periodical during the year 1821. He had acquired this habit during his sojourn at Oxford . . . ." (p. 195).

"Even at his very best, he (De Quincey) was not a writer who could be trusted to *keep himself at that best*" (p. 196).

"*Imaginative splendor of imagery, suitably reproduced in words*" (p. 197).

"For all his best work in prose appeared in periodicals, though it is impossible to say that *all his work* that appeared in periodicals was *his best work*" (p. 199).

"The man (who died a convict in Australia) *although* he cheated the gallows, which was *his due*. . . ." (i.e., cheated the gallows of *its due*) (p. 199).

"In the case of no English poet is it more important . . . than in the case of Tennyson . . . to trace the nature and character of his poetical quality. Nor is this difficult, though *strange to say*, it has not *always* been done" (p. 256).

"There is scarcely a page of him (Ruskin) that can be safely accepted on the whole as matter, and *the unwary have accepted whole volumes*." . . .

"There is so little subtlety about Mr. Ruskin that he *can hardly deceive even an intelligent child when he goes wrong*" (pp. 395-396).

"The rare, though sometimes recorded power" (396).

"The doctrine of Art-for-art's-sake, which, itself as usual half truth and half nonsense" . . . (p. 392).

"For the moment, however, Miss Austen's example had *not so much little influence as none at all*" (p. 131).

One must stop somewhere. These, be it observed, are only a selection from a countless multitude of absurdities and ineptitudes: there are no ten sequent pages in Mr. Saintsbury's book which

will not yield ten more examples of his extraordinary infirmity. If to simple imbecilities we were to add lame phrases, inane preciosities,\* shoddy epigrams,† and, above all, execrably constructed sentences, we might fill an issue of this review from the one volume under notice. But enough has been transcribed to throw a strong light on Mr. Saintsbury's Toryism. A writer who, in going about his special business of literary criticism, thus loses hold every hour of the simplest elements of common sense, needs only bring his mind to bear on politics in order to yield us the worst unreason that the subject admits of.

We are here, however, concerned with Mr. Saintsbury's political proclivities only as they reveal themselves in the work under notice. "I have attempted," he asserts in his preface, "to preserve a perfectly independent and, as far as possible, a rationally uniform judgment, taking account of none but literary characteristics, but taking account of all characteristics that are literary". The moral value of this profession may be gathered from the second sentence of the first chapter of the book, where it is stated that "the most splendid display of Burke's power—the efforts in which he at last gave to mankind

\* Such as this: "The monthly magazine . . . . found a shilling (*which attempts have been recently made to lower to sixpence*) its *almost necessary tariff*" (p. 382).

† Such as the remark (p. 87) that "posterity has agreed" with Keats that his name is writ in water, "but in the Water of Life."

what had previously been too often devoted to party—date from this time (1780-1800), and even from the later part of it.” That is to say, only after 1780 did Burke write “for mankind”; and his ‘Observations on the Present State of the Nation’ (1769), his ‘Thoughts on the Present Discontents’ (1770), the speeches on ‘American Taxation’ (1774), and ‘Conciliation’ (1775), the ‘Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol’ (1777), and the ‘Speech on Economic Reform’ (1780), are inferior and partisan performances in comparison with the ‘Reflections on the French Revolution’; while the ‘Speech on the Nabob of Arcot’s Debts’ (1785), the furious speeches in the debates on the Regency (1788), and the impeachment of Warren Hastings (1788), all products of partisan policy, are certificated as works of lofty humanitarianism. It is hard to say whether the ignorance, the incompetence, or the political bigotry of this verdict is its most salient feature. It proceeds, however, on the ordinary ignorance concerning Burke in that by implication it credits the ‘Reflections’ with a new spirit, when in point of fact Burke’s temper of fury at the French free-thinkers, which is the main inspiration of the treatise, had come out in a blaze in the ‘Speech on Relief of Protestant Dissenters’, in 1773. This kind of ignorance being normal, we may decide that Mr. Saintsbury’s specialty lies in the moral quality of his estimate, which probably no living English critic, of whatever cast of politics, would

even partially endorse. And this crass obtrusion of crass prejudice is made by him on the very first page of a work which pretends to "take account of none but literary characteristics."

After this, we know what to look for. Turning to the account of Shelley, we learn (p. 84) that "He, wholly ignorant, would, if he could, have turned the wheel of society the other way, reckless of the terrible confusion and suffering that he must occasion." The politician of Mr. Saintsbury's type always feels in that way about people with a bias to reform. Peterloo massacres, long and ruinous wars, chronic famine, and endemic misery, he can tolerate without even a speculation as to the amount of "ignorance" that goes to create them; but the bare aspiration to put things on a better footing thrills him to visions of the "terrible confusion and suffering" that the attempt at reform would occasion. Thus for him George III is "the most *harmless* and respectable of English monarchs", while Shelley's philanthropy is a form of ignorance hardly to be distinguished from the criminality of Robespierre. The Professor's account of Thomas Paine, again, carefully alleges that Paine lost his place as a custom-house officer "for debt and dubious conduct"; and a sentence which begins by denouncing the "coarse and violent expression" of Paine's works, ends with the judgment that "the attempts which have recently been made to whitewash him are a mere mistake of reaction, or paradox, or pure stu-

pidity ". Paine's biographer, Dr. Moncure Conway, one of the most temperate and intelligent of critics, is to be charged in a literary manual with "pure stupidity ", and treated by implication (p. 32) as "of singularly weak mind ", because he differs from Mr. Saintsbury on a subject on which he has ten times Mr. Saintsbury's knowledge ; but if Paine be disrespectful to any of Mr. Saintsbury's ideals, he is to be vituperated for "coarse and violent expression ". For the rest, Paine's "Age of Reason " as a whole is declared to be written "in a tone of the coarsest violence"—a statement as true as it would be to say that Mr. Saintsbury writes grammatically or in good taste—while Burke's frantic and foul-tongued vituperations of the whole French nation are the parts of his work in which the Professor finds "the most splendid displays of his power ", purified even of partisanism. Thus is literary history written from a chair of Rhetoric and Literature.

Accusations of stupidity and weakness of mind, coming from the man who can write "not so much little influence as none at all ", and "found a shilling, which attempts have recently been made to reduce to sixpence, its almost necessary tariff," need of course trouble nobody so attacked, any more than blame on points of style and sense from the man who can end a literary history with a sentence noting "how constantly, how incessantly, the kissed mouth has renewed its freshness, the apparently dying flower

has *shed seed and shot suckers* for a new growth ". But that such writing and such manners should figure as guides to youth, in universities or out of them, is a matter for concern to all public-spirited men of letters. Professor Saintsbury is always very ethical over the literary nuisances of the past, "the Della Cruscans and sentimentalists, the Montgomerys and the Tupperes; the terror-novel and the Minerva Press "; but it may be questioned whether any of these made a worse nuisance than the compilations which he turns out as histories of literary periods. The bad writers of the past were certainly not more pretentious, more vicious in style or temper, or more essentially narrow-minded. Professor Saintsbury has skimmed thousands of books without acquiring depth of sympathy or insight, and censured hundreds of men for their writing without attaining the barest measure of caution or competence in his own. The one faculty which in any degree redeems his vices, the faculty without which he would be wholly intolerable to any class of readers, is a certain natural delicacy of literary palate, a real power of discrimination on the æsthetic side of poetry and prose. And this one merit goes as far to gain him a harmful authority where he has no fitness for judgment, as to enable him to redeem his false judgments on morals, thought, and life, by true ones in literary technique ; while the constant badness of his own technique is a perpetual example in evil. No young reader's taste

can be helped—save through repulsion—by such a judgment as this: “If there was any madness in him (Reade), the *hackneyed alliance of great wits was certainly not refused.*” It will be found, too, that Professor Saintsbury hardly ever originates a right appreciation. Rarely does he go out of the beaten track of praise and blame in *belles lettres*, and when he does, his malady of phrase is apt to scare a reader from following him, as when he says, in his notice of Mr. Locker, that “‘My Guardian Angel’, a short prose anecdote, is, *as nearly as the present writer knows*, unique.” His book is, in short, a kind of journalistic epitome of the literary history of the century, as read by a Tory critic; an epitome shockingly ill-written, ill-considered, devoid of breadth and depth of view, and finally destitute of authority, save in so far as it merely registers the literary verdicts of majorities of critics.

All this is doubtless a natural result of Mr. Saintsbury’s long connection with the old *Saturday Review*. He has thought fit to give a page and a half of eulogy to that periodical, while dismissing the *Fortnightly* with the mention that it soon ceased to be a fortnightly, and that it published some of Mr. Meredith’s novels. Of the journal in which he wrote so many pages, Mr. Saintsbury modestly tells us that its general attitude “expressed that peculiar tone of mainly Conservative persiflage which has distinguished in literature the great line of writers beginning with Aristo-



phanes". Further, "it always insisted on the necessity of classical culture". "It observed . . . the salutary principles of anonymity (real as well as ostensible);"\* it was "perfectly fearless, on the whole fairly impartial, informed, *human* errors excepted, by a rather exceptionally high degree of intelligence and education"; and it was "written by gentlemen for gentlemen". Finally, "it may sometimes have mishandled an honest man, it may sometimes have forgiven a knave; but it always hated a fool, and struck at him with might and with main". That is to say, the function of Mr. Saintsbury, as a perfectly fearless and educated gentleman, writing for gentlemen, during a large part of his life, was to strike "with might and with main" at fools from behind a hedge, with the occasional relief of mishandling an honest man and patting a knave on the back, always from the same safe hiding-place. It is a chivalrous and an edifying career. The only trouble is that, while Mr. Saintsbury has acquired from his adventurous past the courage to speak ill of the dead over his name, even as he was wont to speak ill anonymously of the living, he retains the old habit of vituperation and unjust judgment unmodified; and he writes literary history, as he regards it, for "mankind", a good deal in the

\* This assertion is made after it has been mentioned by the historian that Freeman as a journalist was "especially known as a contributor to the *Saturday Review*."

manner in which he aspersed Radicals and free-thinkers for the clubs.

Take, for instance, the fashion in which he treats Emily Brontë.

"To a few fanatical admirers, the scanty verse of Emily Brontë has seemed worthy of such high praise that only mass of work would appear to be wanting to put her in the first rank of poetesses, if not of poets. Part of this [? what], however, it is to be feared, is due to admiration of the supposed freedom of thought in her celebrated 'Last Lines', which either in sincerity or bravado pronounce that 'vain are the thousand creeds', and declare for a sort of vague Pantheism, immanent at once in self and the world. At thirty, however, a genuine poetess should have produced more than a mere handful of verse, and its best things should be independent of polemical partisanship, either for or against orthodoxy."

This is the genuine Sabbatic note, the note which Mr. Henley, a kindred spirit, has in late years made to resound in other periodicals. For the readers of these, any sign of "freedom of thought" must be stigmatised as "supposed" or as "bravado"; and, as the Godly critics must needs extol some religious verse if they would satisfy their clients, they get over the appearance of indecent partisanship by the ingenuous plan of pretending that "vague Pantheism" is really "polemical partisanship against orthodoxy". It is not to be supposed that this is mere ordinary pious prejudice: it is something much more sophisticated. Having taken the pay of Toryism, clerical and lay, the "impartial" critic acquires, for literary purposes, the requisite amount of religion, which is thus justified of its children. The

sincerity with which he applies his canon may be realised on noting how Professor Saintsbury decides that in 'Westward Ho!' Kingsley "vindicates his claim to be the author not merely of good passages, but of a good book, . . . . *in the sustained passion of patriotism* . . . . which pervades it from first to last". That is to say, no literary credit is due to mere "freedom of thought", which is always reducible to polemical partisanship, but a book is to be voted good in respect of its glorification of the most commonplace of all passions. On the same principle, the historian records that Kingsley "was a constant, and at his best, a very good, sermon writer for publication"; while of James Thomson he tells that "under the influence of, or at any rate in company with, the notorious Charles Bradlaugh, he adopted atheistic and republican opinions," and that his prose was "marred by the sectarian violence and narrowness of a small anti-orthodox clique". On the other hand, Trench was "an excellent hymn-writer". It is only anti-orthodoxy that is narrow in Mr. Saintsbury's view, which is broad enough to enable him to attribute atheism, as above, to a man who wrote against atheism, in Mr. Bradlaugh's paper. After this it is a small matter that the Professor should be untruthful enough to describe Mark Pattison as "the most acrimonious critic of his time". With similar rectitude, Professor Saintsbury deals out his praise and blame among political writers, tak-

ing care that "the Whig dogs don't get the best of it". He does not scruple to pronounce Mr. Froude "one of the greatest historians of the century, except for one curious and unfortunate defect, and (without any drawback) one of the great writers of English prose during that (*sic*) century." Of Hallam he complains that he "was *constantly apt* to intrude into the court of literary judgment, methods, procedures, and codes of law which have no business there". This from the author of the 'History of Nineteenth Century Literature'. Of the high Tory Mitford, he gingerly admits that his "hatred of democracy, whether well or ill-founded, makes him *sometimes* unfair"; but of Grote's history, he is careful to affirm that it is "nearly as much a 'party pamphlet' as Macaulay's own"; that it has "absolutely no style", and that Thirlwall had a scholarship "*naturally* far superior to Grote's". As for James Mill, he "was a violent politician of the Radical type, and his opinions of ethics were so peculiar that it is uncertain how far he might have carried them in dealing with historical characters"—a charge which, in Mr. Saintsbury's code, lies against Radical historians only; just as "arrogant and pragmatistical impatience of the supernatural", charged by him against both of the Mills, is in the Professor's view without counterpart on the religious side. And of course he has nothing but praise for Maine and Sir James Stephen, each being a *malleus demagogorum*, and

a writer in the *Saturday*. Of Maine as a thinker in jurisprudence and anthropology, Mr. Saintsbury, having no knowledge on these subjects, cannot well speak ; but he bethinks him to say with his unfailing journalistic air of omniscience, that " his influence in checking that of Austin was admirable ".

These performances raise a question which to many readers must have been suggested by Mr. Saintsbury's title-page—the question, namely, whether any judicious writer would undertake as he has done to give a critical account of all the forms of the manifold English literature of this century. Of much of his subject-matter he has only a superficial or a second-hand knowledge ; of many of the books in which he has read he is quite incompetent to speak as a judge. Writing of the reaction against Carlyle, he observes that, " if this were a history of thought instead of being a history of the verbal expression of thought, it would be possible and interesting to explain this reaction, and to forecast the certain rebound from it ". As a matter of fact, he had already, in the same paragraph, " forecasted " to that effect, " with a fulness and calmness of assurance not to be surpassed in any similar case ". His habitual confusion of mind is exhibited here no less than in the absurd pretence that his farrago of miscellaneous appraisements is a " history of the verbal expression of thought ". But, as for " explaining " any reaction or justifying any forecast,

either proceeding is out of the Professor's power. Coherent reasoning is as alien to him as consistent method. On one and the same page he suggests that those who dispute Carlyle's literary primacy in his century generally do so for "some not strictly literary cause", and that Carlyle himself "could not in the least judge literature . . . . from the point of view of form; he would have scorned to do so, and did scorn those who did so." Finally, he himself offers only the vaguest justification of his literary estimate of Carlyle, including in it the claim that there is "in his arguments a sledge-hammer force", after he has admitted Carlyle's "deficiencies in abstract philosophy, whether political, theological, metaphysical, or other." The criticism is thus a mere string of arbitrary empiricisms. And after all, after pronouncing Carlyle "the greatest English man of letters of the century", in virtue of possessing the "sword of Goliath", he sums up concerning Ruskin that "the more one reads of him the more one feels inclined . . . . to vote *him* the primacy in nineteenth century prose by simple acclamation". Yet these self-contradictions occur on ground on which Mr. Saintsbury might be supposed to be fairly well at home. When he thus fails to know his own mind on a matter of mere literary comparison, we may guess the value of his opinion on questions of historiography, metaphysics, and ethics. In these matters his criticism will strike a good many students as merely a

species of superior charlatanism—superior in respect of its being an echo of the published opinions of better informed or more thoughtful men. And when, as in his account of Bentham, the Professor echoes only the talk of uninformed and shallow men, the criticism reaches the extreme of flashy incompetence.

Taking the book as a whole, we may justly say of it that in an undertaking which a wise man would carry on, if at all, with careful moderation of verdict and modesty of manner, Professor Saintsbury proceeds with constant presumption, dogmatism, and irrelevant self-assertion. The self-satisfaction of his pose is incomparable. We have seen something of the habitual depravity of his mere style, but, writing as he does worse than any man of letters with the least claim to critical rank, he is constantly accusing other people of bad writing. The later style of Bentham he pronounces “atrocious English, clumsy in composition, and crammed with technical jargon”; that of George Eliot he calls an “astonishing pseudo-scientific jargon”; the “philosophical style” of Hamilton he describes as “one of the very worst existing, or that could exist”; he deprecates Browning’s departure from “the sound norms and rules of English phrase”; he decides that “preciousness and slipshodness” are the “great faults” of his contemporaries; he reprimands Mrs. Browning for “fustianish words like ‘reboant’, awkward suggestions of phrase, such

as ' droppings of warm tears ' " ; and all through the book there are scattered shots at " lingo ", " jargon ", and " jargonists ". And through all this dropping-fire of censure he goes on with his own insupportable jargon, putting " fustianish " over against " reboant ", writing " omnilegent " for " studious ", calling Arnold a " skilled *attempter* of epicedes ", making a verb " to unwelcome ", speaking of " practitioners of the sporting novel ", of " lay dealers with the problems of philosophy ", of " flashes of sobering ", of an " anecdotic *locus classicus* of characterisation ", of " one of the most admirable historical styles on record ", of a poem " as right-noted as it is wrong-headed " ; constantly using the slattern phrase " by no means " in the most perfunctory fashion ; writing throughout, as we have seen above, with a combination of slipshodness and preciousness not to be matched in modern literature. As if all this were not enough, he contrives to commit blunders in scholarship which would discredit a member of his junior literature class, making all the while a parade of consummate scholarly accomplishment. People who do not read Latin he describes as " Persons whom modern practice calls and strives to consider ' educated ' " ; and of the late James Thomson's prose (which is nearly as good as his own is bad), he alleges that it is " of necessity lacking in strict scholarship ". Elsewhere our strict scholar speaks of " Goethe's famous maxim, *Ueber allen*



*Gipfeln ist Ruh*," thus showing that he knows only as an isolated quotation, which he ludicrously misunderstands, the beginning of Goethe's best-known lyric. Again, he complains that Mrs. Browning, despite her Greek, rhymes "idyll" to "middle", "though nothing can be longer than the *i* in the first case". That is to say, our strict scholar pronounces the word "eye-dil". It would be interesting to have James Thomson's opinion on his knowledge of German, and Mrs. Browning's on his knowledge of Greek. Some of Mrs. Browning's rhymes were certainly bad enough, but none was worse than some of Mr. Saintsbury's reasons.

But James Thomson, as it happens, did once pass an opinion on a certain article in the *Saturday Review*, and there are very strong reasons for suspecting that the article in question was written by Mr. Saintsbury. Thomson's criticism, written in 1867, is entitled 'The *Saturday Review* on "Mr. Bright's edition of Mr. Bright"'; and it will be found reprinted in the volume of his 'Poems, Essays, and Fragments,' issued in 1892. It is much to be wished that that paper could be put into the hands of every reader of Mr. Saintsbury's book. It extracts from the *Saturday* article a passage of eighteen sentences; and it shows that every one of these sentences is either very absurd or very ill-worded. The demonstration is masterly and unanswerable. Now, it is hardly conceivable that there was any man on the

*Saturday* staff, or indeed any man in England, save Mr. Saintsbury, who could have produced a piece of such essentially and consummately bad writing as that which Thomson then dissected. If our surmise be correct, then, we have an interesting explanation of the Professor's historical assertion that Thomson's prose essays are " marred by the sectarian violence and narrowness of a small anti-orthodox clique ", and " of necessity lacking in strict scholarship ". But, even if the *Saturday* artist whom Thomson flayed were not Mr. Saintsbury, there is that in Thomson's essay which will fully account for the above-cited attack upon him by the whilom *Saturday* reviewer. It begins thus :

" I have always contended that the *Saturday Review* is an essentially bad and foolish periodical ; and various friends whom I sincerely respect have blamed me for thus depreciating the leading weekly of this highly intelligent age in England. My contention has been based upon several considerations, of which I shall here state briefly three.

" First, the *Saturday Review* has no ideas, no aspirations, no philosophic programme ; its chief end is mere clever and cynical comment upon events as they emerge. Its comments are thus not more permanent in interest than the nine-days' wonders to which they are a sneering chorus.

" Secondly, as to mere matters of fact, it is eminently un-instructive. Its reviews, even as written now and then by persons knowing much of the subjects under review, inform the reader of very little save the fact that the reviewers do know a good deal of the said subjects.

" Thirdly, it is scarcely ever written in English. Its common bad articles are written in a gibberish whose particles and auxiliary verbs (very often wrongly used) are English swathed and smothered in interminable ambages of Latin polysyllables and English inflections. Its uncommon good articles consist of about four times as many

words as a good writer, writing well, would use. The style is always heavy, languid, semi-vital, dragging its slow length along like a wounded snake—very venomous.”

The chances are that this criticism of Thomson's will outlive the account given of the *Saturday* by Professor Saintsbury. In the meantime, it gives the right cue to the criticism of the so-called ‘History of Nineteenth Century Literature’.

For the summing-up that will suggest itself to “the competent critic”—an authority often invoked by Mr. Saintsbury, with his eye on the mirror—is that the book is simply a mass of journalism, mostly bad. The Professor partly anticipates such a criticism by observing (p. 447) in his most characteristic style, that “The distinction between literature and journalism which is so often heard is, *like most such things*, a fallacy, or at least capable of being made fallacious”. But in another of his slipshod sentences he finally concedes to the proposition this “grain of truth”, “that the habit of treating some subjects in the peculiar fashion most effective in journalism, may spread disastrously to the treatment of other subjects which ought to be treated as literature”. Well, literature itself surely “ought to be treated as literature”, whatever that may mean. And that Mr. Saintsbury, in his ‘History of Nineteenth Century Literature’, or his ‘History of French Literature’, or his ‘History of Elizabethan Literature’, has risen above “the peculiar fashion most effective in journalism”, is a propo-

sition to which no man of letters is likely to commit himself. There is just one forensic opening for such a thesis. It might be argued that "the peculiar fashion most effective in journalism" must always have been foreign to Professor Saintsbury, because effective journalism implies fairly good writing. But then we must remember that Professor Saintsbury was for many years one of the pillars of the *Saturday Review* —O.S.



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